Elsie

by

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ELSIE.

I.

The windows were opened noiselessly; the soft, caressing, spring breeze played about a woman's youthful face which lay strangely pale and still upon the snowy pillows of a bed; it fanned the fair curls upon the pallid brow and stirred the delicate draperies of a cradle which had been relegated to the farthest corner of the room, as if it were in everybody's way.

"Rise, Hegebach," said a full voice, "God gives and takes away, and we must be resigned."

With those words, a tall, well-developed woman of forty approached the man who kneeled motionlessly beside the bed, his arms encircling the rigid form in bitterest anguish. He did not stir; the speaker hastily brushed the tears from her bright, intelligent eyes.

"Hegebach, you cannot remain here all day with-

out any food. Come," she added, suppressing a sob, "come, Hegebach, you have other duties; think of your child!"

He sighed deeply and rose. He was not a young man, and sorrow made him appear still older. His eyes rested almost wildly upon the sweet, peaceful face so calmly slumbering upon its pillow; then turning abruptly, he left the room, not like a grief-stricken man, but like an angry one.

The woman, who remained behind, gently rearranged the white napkin over the features of the dead; as she did so, she caressingly stroked the child-like face; then she took the cradle from its corner and bore it away.

From the room opposite the one she had just left, issued a wail; she hastily opened the door and entered a small chamber lighted by a single window, to all appearances that of the deceased, infinitely pretty but almost too simple for a lady of rank. There was no one in the room, but upon the sofa lay a small, white bundle, from which protruded a couple of tiny, red fists. The tall, stately lady fell upon her knees beside the sofa and buried her face in the cushions.

"Ah," she murmured, "your prospects are not very bright, you poor thing! No mother! And your father acts as if God had afflicted him because you are a girl. Why were you not a boy? And

they have all left you, of course! They let you scream here and perish with hunger!"

She paused, and for a moment gazed reflectively at the wee, red face which was again puckered up into a hundred wrinkles, ready for another cry!

"Wait, just wait," said she, quickly seizing the child, "I will take you with me to the castle. What can he do with such a baby?"

Two days thereafter, Captain Hegebach's young wife was buried. Her short life was the talk of the entire village, and he who was ignorant of the details, soon learned that she was a very poor girl, who had only married the man, who was likewise poor, and many years her senior, in order to have someone to care for her.

No one had looked for his marriage, for he was an old bachelor. It was just a year since he had brought that sunbeam into his house to gladden it —what brief happiness!

Captain von Selchow, however, told his younger comrades, on the way to the house of mourning, that he knew from authentic sources that Hegebach's marriage had been made in sheer desperation. The latter had, fifteen months before, received a letter from his uncle informing him that he did not wish to leave his fortune to a couple of old bachelors, such as his nephews were. Whichever of the two could inform him first of the birth of a

legitimate heir, should be the preferred one—daughters would not be considered. Hegebach's cousin did not answer the letter, and it was rumored that he had formed connections which he could not sever at once. Hegebach replied eight days later with the announcement of his engagement.

"That is all. The rest you know. Little Hegebach was a charming woman; it is sad," he concluded pathetically.

Frau von Ratenow had nursed the young mother during her illness, and after her death she did the honors in the house of mourning; the two women were distantly related.

Frau von Hegebach had no parents to follow her to the grave, but her husband's brother-officers came to pay their tribute of respect to the dead, and the regimental band preceded the flower-laden coffin, playing, "Jesus, Refuge of my Soul." The widower followed the hearse in full uniform; his set face expressed not grief, but disdain, and a scornful smile played about his lips.

The ceremony was over. The throng had dispersed; a new mound was added to the number in the churchyard, and the street in the neighborhood of the house of mourning was almost deserted; only one carriage with two magnificent horses stood at the Hegebachs' door.

In the bedroom which had so recently been occupied by the frail young wife, stood a cradle in which lay the sleeping child; an old servant, her hands lying idly in her lap, sat beside it with eyes swollen from weeping.

Frau von Ratenow entered the captain's dreary sitting-room; she wore her hat and shawl.

"Good-bye, Hegebach," said she, "I must go home; they have just sent for me. Moritz has come. That the little girl will be well taken care of, I need not assure you."

He was standing at the window; as she spoke, he turned and looked in astonishment at the resolute, still handsome woman.

"Yes," she continued, "Hegebach, she is here, and she must have attention. No baby could thrive in these smoky rooms. I shall take her for her mother's sake, for I am no longer accustomed to little ones. Moritz is twenty."

"Thank you, madame," he murmured, "indeed I did not think—"

"Don't mention it, dear Hegebach. I only wished to ask you not to dislike the child because you will not obtain the Bennewitz estate. Man proposes, God disposes! Who knows what good may come of it?"

"My cousin is to be married next month, madame."

"Well, let him marry," was the reply. If he has the wished-for son, the inheritance will be his; we knew that long ago."

"And the child!" he exclaimed with infinite bitterness. "A poor girl!—you know what that is, in our position, as well as I!"

"It is bad enough, of course! but she will get on like other girls; she must learn to work; she has two strong little hands and two bright eyes. What shall we call her?" she continued calmly. "Shall we name her 'Elizabeth' after her mother?"

He nodded assent and turned to the window again.

"Good-bye, Hegebach; would you not like to see the baby?"

He pressed his brow against the panes and made a gesture as if to ward her off.

"Well, I hope she will prove a blessing to you, Hegebach; that you will thank God upon your knees for the comfort sent you by Him, in your old days. May that be your reward."

With a flush of anger upon her cheeks, she entered the bedroom.

"Take the baby, Siethmann; we are going now." And followed by the woman carrying the infant, she entered her carriage.

The drive was not a long one. The carriage drew up at a fine mansion, and a tall, young man,

apparently in traveling-dress, rushed down the steps, opened the door and kissed the lady's hands.

"Had I only known it, mother!" he said. "But I could not possibly have gone to the funeral in this dress. Great Heavens! what is that?" he cried, pointing to the woman who had just alighted with the infant in her arms.

"Lisa's child, Moritz. For God's sake! you will let her fall!"

But the young man, with the open countenance, had already taken the tiny bundle in his arms, and bore it into the house, followed by his mother and the nurse.

"Oh, Heavens!" he exclaimed, as he reached the sitting-room and examined the small face tenderly, "how wee it is!—Poor, dear Lisa!" And he turned hastily to the window in order to hide the tears which sprang to his eyes.

"You see, mother," he added, after a pause, "if you had not persuaded Lisa, when that morose old captain proposed to her, she would still be alive."

"For shame, Moritz!" returned Frau von Ratenow, taking the child from his arms. "For whom should the girl have waited?"—The young man's eyes filled with tears— "I will hear no reproaches. Lisa fulfilled her duties as a wife; now let the subject rest."

"Will the little one remain with us?"

"Certainly; where should she go?"

"That is kind of you," said he, twining his arms about the stately woman.

"Nonsense, Moritz; you know that I am not sentimental. Your father was inclined to sentimentality, and you have inherited it from him."

She tried to appear contemptuous, but she was unsuccessful; maternal love sparkled in her eyes as she gazed upon her handsome boy.

"Now, my son, we must provide for the babe! What do you think, shall I give her up to Aunt Lott?"

"What?" he cried, in surprise; then he added gayly: "Give me the young lady; I will carry her up! I must be there!"

Aunt Lott was Frau von Ratenow's foster-sister and cousin, and the owner of a small estate at *Z*—; but, with the exception of eight weeks which she spent at *Z*— annually, she lived at the castle. She was a gentle, quiet, not overintelligent creature, the exact opposite of Frau von Ratenow, although they had been reared together.

Aunt Lott lived in the world of Poetry—in the higher spheres; she read everything she could lay her hands upon, and the more touching and heart-rending the story, the more beautiful she considered it.

When her practical cousin married Herr von

Ratenow, Lott remained at home with the lonely parents; after their demise, she repaired to the castle and took possession of two pleasant rooms on the upper floor, which rooms she kept painfully neat.

A purring cat sat upon the window-ledge, on this particular day, and Aunt Lott herself sat by the window reading a psalm; she wore a black dress and black apron, for she had dearly loved young Frau von Hegebach. In that very room, scarcely a year before, the girl had tearfully and timidly placed her hand in that of her middle-aged suitor. And now into that same room Moritz von Ratenow bore her little daughter, and laid her without a word on Aunt Lott's lap.

"There, auntie, now you have something for the cat to be jealous of!"

"Great heavens!" she cried, and her eyes wandered from the child to the pale, grave face of Frau von Ratenow.

"You have the most time, Lott; take the child; I brought her nurse, Siethmann, with me; you shall not have much trouble with her. She could not stay with her father, for she does not smoke cigars, and I, you know, cannot take care of her, with all my household duties."

The old maid clasped the tiny bundle tenderly in her arms. She did not speak—she could not; but

she nodded energetically and wiped her eyes, and that was sufficient.

Moritz brought the cradle upstairs, and as day was drawing in, they seated themselves beside it—Aunt Lott in a chair with her knitting, young Herr von Ratenow on a footstool—and they talked so earnestly of the dead that they did not hear Frau von Ratenow open the door and look in upon them.

"A strange boy," murmured the mother; "a man with the heart of a child—just like his father; of course he is not like me!"

So the child grew up in the old, linden-shaded house. When at two years of age she looked out of its windows, over the roofs and towers, across the village, and when the question: "Who lives over there?" was put to her, she would take her fingers from her mouth, and pointing in the direction of the City Hall, reply with sparkling eyes: "Papa!"

Papa, indeed—a father who scarcely knew his child—who only occasionally paid a visit of duty to the castle, and looked so gloomily at the fair little one who joyfully ran to meet him, and reached longingly for the bright buttons on his uniform. She was a strikingly beautiful child, the pet of the entire household. Of Aunt Ratenow only did she stand in awe; her rosy cheeks would turn as

white as marble at a single reproving glance from her.

"She must soon go to school," said Frau von Ratenow one day as she sat by the window, and her eyes followed the child as she flitted across the court; "she will be five years old in April."

"To school?" asked Moritz, who was home for the Easter vacation, as he paced to and fro, in a light gray summer suit, an incipient mustache upon his upper lip and his complexion as rosy as ever.

"To school?" he repeated, pausing in front of his mother.

Frau von Ratenow looked at him in astonishment.

"I know, dear mother, that she must learn to read and write, but why not at home? There are plenty of governesses."

Her work dropped into her lap and her bright eyes assumed an astonished expression.

"Moritz, I do not know how you can think of such a thing. If I had daughters of my own, I should, perhaps—I say 'perhaps,' have chosen that exclusive mode of instruction; but the child would only be spoiled by it, and she is unfortunately spoiled enough now!"

"Is the little creature to trudge such a distance in all kinds of weather? Let her, at least in the winter, ride in—"

She replied calmly: "If you can guaranty her a carriage later on, very well; from April on, Elsie will go to school."

"You have the right to decide, mother!"

"Yes, my boy. Now, let us talk of your plans; when you return from Vienna in the autumn, shall we keep house here together?"

He laughed and kissed the hand she held toward him.

"Surely you are not thinking of getting married?" she said suddenly, looking sharply at the young man.

"Yes, I am, dear mother," he replied, drawing nearer her side, "I will confess honestly, I have thought of it."

"Whom have you chosen, Moritz?"

"An old flame, little mother; but do not worry; she has just gone to boarding-school."

"Is that so? What will she learn there? She will grow pale and thin; she will become a nerveless puppet; she will never be a healthy wife and mother; and have you thought of what she will unlearn: all love of a peaceful, domestic life will fly out of the window. You should not have let her go away, Moritz, if you want her to remain innocent."

Moritz glanced at his mother in surprise as she knitted calmly on; he paced the room several times, his hands behind his back.

"Did you know, Moritz, that Hegebach is going to retire?" she asked after a pause.

"That is the best thing he can do," replied her son, "for he quarrels with all his superiors."

"How about the small pension?"

"Oh, he can live on it, mother."

"He? Yes—but the child?" she asked impatiently.

"Oh, mother!"

"You, Moritz, talk of marriage. When you have half a dozen children, where do you think I shall get the money from for so many?" She uttered the words in jest and they both laughed.

"You dear little mother," he cried, kissing her lips.

"No, all joking aside," said she, "I will provide for Elsie. You need not think I shall do things by halves. She must learn something; I think she should be a governess, and, as soon as she is ten years old, I shall take her to D—. Is not that the best thing to do, Moritz?"

At that moment the door opened softly and a tiny head with golden hair was thrust in, a pair of large, brown eyes sparkled in the rosy, smiling face, and a sweet, bird-like voice asked:

"Moritz, Moritz, will you come into the garden? A squirrel is in the chestnut-tree."

"Come here, Elsie!" cried the young man, and

when the child hastened to him, he took her in his arms like a doll and carried her to his mother.

"Just look at her, mother," he said in a strangely gentle voice. The lady glanced at the pure, child-like face and then inquiringly at her son.

"Now run along, Elsie, I will come after you," and the young man carefully opened the door for the tiny creature to pass through.

"Is she not," he asked, returning, "as fresh as a rose-bud? And you propose to shut her up in a dismal school-room far into the years of her maidenhood, and to make her miserable by overtaxing her brain. Mother, you have made me uneasy. What a world of tears and wakeful nights, of buried hopes and bitter denials lie in those words: *She must become a governess!* Ah, mother, do not force her to it, the poor, little thing!"

"Why, Moritz," said Frau von Ratenow impatiently, "you talk as if I were about to do the child a grievous wrong. Give her an allowance, if you can! Do you know that she has nothing but three hundred dollars of her mother's? When Hegebach dies, he will leave, at the most, debts; and what then? However, matters have not gone so far yet, and you need not pity your '*rose-bud!*' As you are in love, my son, I will forgive the comparison; *she* is, no doubt, a rose-bud too."

With those words she laid her knitting in the

basket and left the room; shortly after, her son heard her resonant voice saying, below-stairs:

"I will soon show you that it can be done. One can do anything, if one wants to."

Late that evening Moritz von Ratenow knocked at his mother's door.

"I surely heard you ride into the court," she said to him as he entered. "Come in; where have you been?"

He seated himself upon the side of her bed and said: "Guess! But no, you cannot—I have been to my father-in-law-elect's. It was on account of the *pension*, mother. I told him that I loved Frieda, that she loved me, and that if he had no objection we would get married, and—"

"Of course he had no objection!" she exclaimed proudly.

"No, he had none! And Frieda is coming home."

"How old is she, Moritz?"

"Sixteen and a half. Frau von Teesfeld thinks we should wait four years."

"That is very sensible, Moritz."

"Are you satisfied, mother?" he asked softly.

"What can I do? She is from a family as good as ours, and if she takes after her father, she will make a fine woman." She paused thoughtfully. "I have not been observant enough. Had I suspected that she was to be my daughter-in-law—

but," she continued, "it seems to me that her father once said to me: 'Frieda is as capricious as her mother.' Yes, I remember it distinctly. Now, listen: if that is so, you must hold the reins somewhat tightly."

He laughed. "Her charm lies, mother, in her being such an elf."

"That is nothing to laugh about, Moritz," she censured. "But now go to bed. I shall drive to Teesfeld to-morrow! As your mother, I must do so out of compliment to you." And she stroked his fair hair, caressingly. "Go to bed now, and do not gaze at the moon any longer."

When he was gone, she sat up in bed for a long time with folded hands. "I am glad he is so resolute," she said at length, half-aloud. "When his father was courting me, the very birds sang of it from the tree-tops. The boy knows his own mind —that he inherits from me!"

II.

The door of an old house, the windows of which overlooked a narrow street, was softly pushed open and the graceful form of a girl barely ten years of age passed through it. The child wore a simple gray dress and a brown straw hat, from beneath which fell two heavy braids of flaxen hair. In her hand she carried a small basket containing pears and grapes; she hastily ascended the stairs and knocked at a door.

"Come in!" cried a man's voice, and the next moment Elsie von Hegebach stood before her father, in a room filled with clouds of tobacco-smoke. The man looked very old and very untidy in his threadbare dressing-gown; his skin had grown sallow and the fretful expression upon his face had changed to a domineering one. Notwithstanding that, the rosy, youthful face was pressed confidingly against his cheek.

"Papa, how are you?" asked the child, and placing her basket on the table, she threw both arms around her father's neck.

"Do not always ask me that the first thing," was the irritable reply.

A shadow of pain flitted across the child's smiling countenance.

"Papa, may I stay with you awhile, or are you going to the club?" she asked shyly.

"You know I am going to the club, but Siethmann is in the next room."

"Dear papa,"—the tiny, rosy mouth quivered, but the tears were bravely restrained, "I will not stay long: you know I must bid you 'Good-bye' to-day—to-morrow, I am to go to D—."

"Already to-morrow?" he asked, looking up from his paper. "What time do you go?"

"Frau Cramm said I should be at her house at seven o'clock. Aunt Ratenow asked Frau Cramm to take me with her, for Annie is going to D— too; and as Moritz gets married to-day, and they are all at Teesfeld, there is no one at home to take me—"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted impatiently, "all right. The term probably begins the day after to-morrow."

"Yes! Shall I read the paper to you awhile, papa?"

"No, thank you. A safe journey, Elsie, and be diligent."

He held out his hand to her and turned again

to his paper. The child for a moment stood beside him motionlessly; her pallid lips moved, but not a word escaped them; then she turned to leave the room.

"Elsie!" her father called out.

She started.

"Give that stuff to Siethmann; I do not eat it," and he pointed to the dainty basket. Suddenly she fell upon her knees before him.

"Papa, papa!" she cried, "why do you not love me? Why do you not speak kindly to me, as Annie's father does to her?"

Her delicate form trembled; in her agitation she laid her fair head upon his knee and burst into convulsive sobs.

"Good Lord, child, get up!" cried old Siethmann, who, on hearing the girl's sobs, had entered the room. She raised Elsie from the floor, at the same time casting a severe glance at the major. He had risen and in his excitement was pacing to and fro.

"Who has done anything to you?" he asked, half-anxious, half-provoked. "Have you been scolded? What ails you? Tell me! If you are ill, Siethmann shall go with you and put you to bed?"

"I am not ill," was the gentle reply. "Good-bye, papa!" And hastily wiping her eyes, she

passed from that room into the one which had formerly been her mother's, and in which Siethmann lived since she kept house for the major. The child seated herself at the window and gazed upon the neglected garden; for several weeks she had been very sad.

One day Aunt Ratenow had summoned her to her room, and had said to her, as she stroked her soft, fair hair: "Elsie, you are now ten years old and a sensible girl; it is time to talk seriously with you. You know that everyone in order to be happy must be of some use in the world, and you wish to be useful too, do you not? Many are born, so to speak, with silver spoons in their mouths, and during their entire lives they need not worry nor ask: What shall we eat, what shall we drink, what shall we wear? Others have nothing else to do but to ask those questions. Your father, Elsie, is a sickly, lonely man, who has had many crosses to bear; he is, too, a poor man; he cannot give you a silver spoon. But in place of that, the Almighty has endowed you with an intelligent mind and a healthy body, and it will be easy for you, if you so desire, to answer the questions I just mentioned to you. I wish to impress upon you to be diligent and studious, so that you may obtain your governess' certificate. That is the only means a young lady of good birth has of making her own way in the world."

It seemed to the child as if a dark veil had been suddenly cast over her entire life. The gray school-room with its oppressive atmosphere—with its walls which seemed to crush her, with its windows through which a sunbeam seldom glinted—rose before her eyes. She was to be walled in—she who loved flowers, air and sunlight!—walled in, not alone until she was a woman, but forever, forever! It could not be!

"Well, Elsie, do you not like the idea?"

She shook her head.

"Then remain a little dunce, and you will be like Siethmann, some day! An ignorant person receives treatment accordingly."

"Why should I have to do that?" Elsie exclaimed. "Other girls do not!" And she raised her doe-like eyes to the stately lady's grave face, as if awaiting the solution of an incomprehensible problem.

"Many have to, Elsie, and you are one of the many. It is my duty to educate you so that some day you may be independent. Now go; you know you should be obedient, Elsie, even if you do not see why you should be."

Elsie then flew to Aunt Lott with pallid cheeks and panting breath.

"I am to go away, aunt."

She could not utter another word, but her eyes

roved about the cozy room and finally rested on the kind, old face; she saw two tears trickle down the wrinkled cheeks and fall upon the old lady's cap-strings. She could not weep. She was to go away for so long a time—away from the home of her childhood, from the shady garden, from Moritz, and from all!

The day before, Aunt Lott had tearfully packed her trunk; she had bidden her, Aunt Ratenow and dear Moritz farewell, for they all went to Teesfeld for the wedding. Elsie would have liked to have gone too, but Aunt Ratenow would not hear of it.

"What could you do there, Elsie?" she had asked. "Children are always in the way."

She was alone all day, for even the cat took a walk. What difference did it make that the maid gave her a glass of wine and a piece of cake for dessert?

"Elsie, master bade me give you this," she had said.

For the first time she was lonesome, and she felt a passionate yearning for a heart which was solely hers; then she had hastened to her father, with what results we have already seen.

Suddenly Elsie sprang up; she could no longer remain in the stifling room. It smelt of stale coffee; there were grease-spots on the floor; on the wall hung Siethmann's entire wardrobe; the furni-

ture was moth-eaten and worn threadbare by hard usage.

The young girl descended the stairs, walked hastily through several streets, and finally reached the cemetery, which she entered; she sought out and paused before the ivy-covered resting-place of the mother she had never known. The September day was drawing to a close, dark clouds were gathering in the west and the evening breezes fanned the child's flushed cheeks.

"Mother!" she whispered. There was an indescribable accent of anguish in her voice as she uttered that word. She crouched down and laid her cheek caressingly against the simple iron cross. She remained in that position until the sexton's wife, accidentally passing by, kindly warned her to return home as the cemetery was about to be closed. She gathered a few ivy leaves before she left the grave. On arriving home she stood at the window in Aunt Lott's room and listened to the singing of the men-servants, and of the maids, who were celebrating their master's wedding-day by drinking punch in the servant's hall.

On the following morning at eight o' clock, when the sun with difficulty pierced the clouds, it shone upon a pale, childish face which peered with large, wondering eyes out of the window of a carriage which rolled along the highway. In the carriage

sat a plump, blooming woman, wrapped in a black velvet mantle, and a corpulent man; between that couple sat their little daughter with straw-colored hair and a snub nose; they were taking her to the well-known institute at D— for a couple of years. Each parent held one of the small hands, and one could tell by the mother's eyes that she had wept bitterly.

Elsie sat alone on the back seat with the bundles, and before the child stretched, dark and uncertain, that unknown life in which her tiny feet had taken their first steps that day.

III.

Eight years had passed since that time.

In his stuffy room on the "Rosengasse," still smoking and reading, sat Major von Hegebach, while old Siethmann still prepared her abominable coffee. The major did not, however, go to the club as regularly as he once had done, for walking was difficult with him. Gout had deprived him of his only diversion, and his disposition was not improved by it. Siethmann had a harder time of it than ever; but she did not realize the situation, for she had grown duller; and nothing, with the exception perhaps of Elsie and her coffee-can, could awaken any interest in her.

Regularly every four weeks a letter lay upon the old man's desk, the handwriting at first the laborious effort of a child's pen, and later on, the delicate but not characterless writing of a woman. He had only written to his daughter once, and that was when Elsie was confirmed; the letter was treasured up in a box with a necklace of garnets, the only ornament her mother had possessed.

A tender, grateful reply was forwarded to him

with the childish promise to always remain an obedient daughter. On the day of which we are writing a letter again lay before him.

"My Dear Beloved Papa:

"You are the first to be informed that I passed my examination No. 1! The principal has just told me so. I am so rejoiced that all the trouble is forgotten. I shall come home now in a few days, my dear papa, and I am delighted at the thought of seeing you again.

"Your affectionate daughter, Elsie."

He read the letter and his face grew grave. While he was thinking it over, a pair of hands at the castle were busy preparing the room for the loved one who was about to return. Aunt Lott and Aunt Ratenow had received the same joyful news, by the second post, and Aunt Lott had at once begun to set to rights the young girl's former nursery. It was of course understood that she would occupy that room.

Frau von Ratenow's sitting-room had not changed with time; she herself had grown somewhat stouter, and her firm will was perhaps more strongly marked on her features; and yet there had been a change which lent the cozy room, with its soft carpet and its heavy blue hangings, a more domestic character! Before the fire-place in which a fire crackled, three

children were playing—a boy and two girls—the latter, fair, blue-eyed and rosy-cheeked, like their father; the boy a dark-complexioned rogue, the household pet, the baby. These little ones were frolicking, romping and making a din generally, which would have disturbed anyone but a grandmother.

Frau von Ratenow was reading a letter, which she let fall upon her lap and then took up again.

"Lulu!" she cried at length, "fetch your papa."

The eldest, a girl of five, sprang up and hastened out of the room.

In a few moments a short but graceful woman, in an elegant black dress, entered. The children greeted her with: "Mamma! Mamma!"

"You little darlings!" said she, kissing them; and turning to Frau von Ratenow she said, with a show of curiosity: "Moritz will be here directly, mamma; what is it?"

"Is your name Moritz, sauciness?" asked the old lady, not unkindly.

But the dainty little creature was not to be frightened off. With a laugh she threw her arms around her mother-in-law's neck.

"Oh, mamma, you know I am terribly curious; surely it is no state secret! Please, please, let me stay!"

"Will you ever be sensible, Frieda? Will you

always remain a child? It is because Moritz has spoiled you so!"

She seemed created to be spoiled—that charming little person with the perfect form, delicate, oval face, large, deep-blue eyes with long, dark lashes, and blue-black, glossy hair, which, simply dressed, showed to advantage the finely-shaped head. It was no wonder that the "boy," as his mother called him, was as deeply in love as upon the first day of his married life.

"Of course," said he, on entering the room, pretending to be vexed while his eyes glowed with the light of affection; "here she is again, in order to hear what is going on!"

"I know nothing yet, Moritz!"

"That is very sad, little wife," he cried. "Be quiet, good-for-nothings!" he continued, stopping up his ears, "who can say a word here? Go over to Caroline!"

The mother handed her son a letter.

"Elsie has passed her examination and will be home Tuesday," she said.

"Ah, is that so?" cried Moritz with delight. "She will, no doubt, be glad to turn her back upon the school-room."

"I wanted to ask you, Moritz, what should be done with her."

His kindly, honest eyes gazed at her in astonishment.

"Nothing at all at first, mother. I think the poor thing should have a good rest; she probably needs it."

Frau von Ratenow nodded. "Very well! But it will make her return to her father's house so much the more difficult."

"Yes, Moritz, you will spoil her!" cried the young wife.

"Poor child, what will she do at that old bear's?" he asked compassionately.

"It is her duty to care for her father, who is growing old. Siethmann is more stupid and untidy than ever."

"Yes, mother, you are right," he interrupted, "but she cannot go at once. The house must at least be renovated so that a respectable person can live in it. Had I suspected this, it would have been done long ago; as it is now, I will not permit the girl to enter it. The first two weeks she must remain here; so, pray, raise no objections."

"We are just where we began," said the old lady.

"That is the right place, mother."

A pause ensued during which only the clicking of the knitting-needles was heard.

"It was two years ago to-day that the Bennewitz Hegebach's two sons met with that accident," said the young man at length. "It is terrible to lose two children at one time!"

"Yes, it is," agreed his wife. "I cannot comprehend to this day how it happened."

"It was very simple, Frieda. The two boys sailed out on the Elbe alone in a boat which a sudden squall must have capsized, for on the following day their bodies were found."

"That was a heavy blow," remarked Frau von Ratenow. "It is only four years since his wife died!" Her hands fell into her lap and she gazed thoughtfully before her; finally she said with heightened color: "Could we not make a match there for Elsie? The man is wealthy and has no one—"

"Indeed I have thought of that," interrupted Moritz. "For as daughters, according to the will, are debarred from the inheritance, and as Hermann von Hegebach is not an old man, it stands to reason that he will marry again, and—"

"I must invite him here," interrupted Frau von Ratenow. "I found his card the other day."

"Do you know him, mamma?" asked the young wife. "I never paid any attention to him, but my sister, Lili, is very enthusiastic about him," she rattled on; "he is a handsome man; he does not resemble his cousin; I know nothing more about him."

Frau von Ratenow made no reply to those words.

"Moritz," she asked, "how are the roads?"

"Very good, mother."

"Then pray excuse me; I am going out." She rose, and nodding pleasantly to the husband and wife, entered the adjoining room.

"Where are you going, mother?" asked Moritz.

"Mamma, in fifteen minutes I am going to drive to Frau von Kayser's," cried Frieda. "Can you wait that long?"

"Thank you, my children, I shall walk;" but an answer to the question—whither—they did not receive.

It was already dusk when Frau von Ratenow returned and, ascending the stairs, knocked at Aunt Lott's door.

The old lady was seated at the window, looking out into the garden; she had laid aside her book and knitting, for it was what she called, "blind man's holiday."

"Lott, it is incredible!" exclaimed Frau von Ratenow, seating herself breathlessly upon the nearest chair. Aunt Lott was startled; her cousin rarely lost her self-control.

"Ratenow! For God's sake, what has happened?" she asked.

"I have come to you because I cannot talk with Moritz about it."

"What has happened?"

"Well, you know, Elsie is coming the day after

to-morrow. Moritz and I do not agree as to her future. I say: 'She should go to her father.' He says: 'She should come here.'"

"And Frieda?" Aunt Lott interrupted.

"Frieda? Frieda has nothing to do with it," she replied contemptuously. "Once she says one thing, and once another, just as she happens to feel; she has no opinion—has never had any. If she wanted to produce a play and someone was lacking for a part which Elsie could fill, she would say: 'Oh, mamma, do not let her go to that bear of a father!' and if we should happen to be thirteen at table, she would say: 'Oh, mamma, the child should go to her father!' on account of the ominous number." Frau von Ratenow paused a moment, then continued, gathering up her heavy silk mantle, "I went to Hegebach myself! I hoped he would want to take his child home, that his house might be brighter. And what do you think, Lott?" she exclaimed, raising her voice and letting her hands fall heavily on the table. "He does not want her! Have you ever heard of a father not wanting his own child? He finally grew angry and said that a young girl required so much amusement, while he needed rest, rest!"

"But, Ratenow, you let it vex you unnecessarily!" cried Aunt Lott, soothingly. "He was always like that!"

"What!" exclaimed the old lady, "one should not get angry? He actually told me that he had no use for such an expensive luxury as a grown-up daughter. He had barely enough for himself; he had to pay off old debts every month. He could do no more than he had done in giving Lisa's three hundred dollars; 'Elsie,' he said, 'must put to some use what she had learned; how many had to do the same!'—and so forth."

"Poor girl! Poor girl!" lamented Aunt Lott, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief.

"But I told him what I thought of him," continued the excited woman, "and you know my words are not always clothed in honey."

Aunt Lott did not reply; she knew that only too well.

"So Moritz will have his way," Frau von Ratenow added crossly.

"Never mind, cousin," comforted Aunt Lott, whose heart was secretly filled with joy that her pet was coming home, "never mind, who knows how all will end—"

"I know very well, Lott," Frau von Ratenow interrupted, "that this is the way it will be: a gay life, such as is now the fashion, and some day she will have to work, for the 'must' will come, depend upon it, and perhaps it is not very far off. Then she will have forgotten how to accommodate herself to circumstances."

"Leave that in the hands of Providence, Ratenow. She may marry."

"Will you assure her a dowry, Charlotte?" she asked scornfully. "You cannot buy a single loaf nor set your table once with your poetry. The stomach is there, my child, and even during the period of love craves food. Our young men of to-day know that very well, and they know too, that caviare tastes better than boiled rice."

To that speech Aunt Lott made no reply, but after a pause she ventured to say timidly:

"Ratenow, I have an idea! If you—if Moritz—Frieda said the other day she must soon have a governess—if Elsie could begin with the children, she is energetic and—" She hesitated and glanced at her vis-a-vis.

"Perhaps that would do, Lott," said Frau von Ratenow rising. "It is not a bad idea; indeed, I will speak to Moritz about it at once."

She gathered up her mantle and threw it over her arm. At the door she turned and said: "I should like to have the child near me and I should prefer to have her occupy a position other than that of an ordinary governess. But, do not say that I said so! Good evening, Lott."

The door closed behind her and Aunt Lott stood in the center of her room shaking her head.

Oh, the world was growing more and more prosaic!

IV.

The dreary, unpleasant October day was drawing to a close. The locomotive, with a long row of coaches behind it, rushed through the heavy, gray fog, emitting clouds of steam.

At the window of a ladies' coupe stood a tall, slender girl. She was the sole occupant of the coupe, on that damp, autumn evening, but upon her youthful face there were no signs of fatigue; her cheeks were aglow with joyful expectation, her doe-like eyes sparkled, a smile lurked about her small, full lips, with their sweet, child-like expression.

She turned from one window to the other; nothing was to be seen but steam; the train traveled insupportably slowly, she thought. For the twelfth time she took up her sachel and laid it down again. How surprised they would all be! Moritz was to meet her at ten o'clock and it was only seven. Her heart palpitated violently, as the engine gave a long, shrill whistle, and several lights passed the windows. How long a time since she had been home! For two years and a half she had not spent her

vacation at the castle; once the family was at some resort, then the children had the measles, and—ah! —there was the station!

Elsie lowered the window and leaned out; there was the well, there the old one-eyed porter, and farther on flickered the village lamps. It was truly a pleasure to come home once more!

"Where to, miss?" asked the porter.

"Oh, my trunk can remain here; it will be fetched to-morrow," said she hastily; "I came sooner than I was expected."

"Are you going to walk?" The man seemed disappointed.

It suddenly occurred to Elsie that Aunt Ratenow had always considered it improper for ladies to walk alone.

"You may carry my sachel, but be quick, please," and she preceded the man up the familiar high-road to the city gate; she did not pause until she reached the "Thorgasse." There stood the old town-hall towers, the irregular houses; and the lanterns still swung upon their chains in the middle of the streets. The bells rang just the same, and the shop at which Moritz had occasionally bought her bonbons had still the same blackamoor in its window to show that good tobacco could be had there. As Elsie halted she glanced up at a couple of dimly-lighted windows; involuntarily she felt an impulse

to ascend the stairs—to go to her father's; but Moritz had written her emphatically that he and Aunt Ratenow wanted to speak to her first; she must be obedient, and slowly she turned back.

"A nice, roundabout way, miss," grumbled her companion. "You surely are not acquainted here."

She nodded smilingly and proceeded rapidly to the Linden alley. Her heart throbbed wildly as she saw before her the dear old house. Upstairs were Aunt Lott's windows, which were lighted, and below were Aunt Ratenow's. The lamps were burning brightly; through the kitchen windows forms could be seen moving to and fro, and the large carriage was being drawn out of the coach-house.

"You can go," Elsie whispered to the man, taking the sachel; and putting a gold-piece in his hand, she hastened on, crossed the court, ascended the steps, and entered the hall. Where should she go first? She hesitated but a moment; she turned toward the staircase—that tiny room upstairs was home to her!

"Aunt Lott!" she cried, upon the threshold, her voice ringing out through the old maid's silent apartments like the song of a lark.

"Elsie! Darling!" was the reply.

Yes, she was at home again, for here she was expected. Ah, how delightful it was!

"Heavenly Father! I should not have recognized you, Elsie, only your eyes are the same!" cried Aunt Lott after having embraced the girl.

"Dearest Auntie, I have grown, have I not? I am eighteen years old, too!"

"Come, come, take off your cloak; tea will soon be ready. Indeed you are eighteen, child!"

"Ah, aunt, I take such pleasure in living," the girl interrupted. "When I was sitting at my books and my head ached so that I could learn nothing, then I thought of all the beautiful things that come to everyone—of my youth which lay before me. Sister Beate always said that Heaven allotted everyone his or her share of happiness. Ah, aunt, how delighted I am with mine! I could scarcely wait until I could leave the school-room."

Aunt Lott hastily poured out the tea; she was dreaming of spring and of the warbling of nightingales; she too had been young, and in her room was sitting the embodiment of spring! How handsome Elsie had grown! how bright was her young face; how sparkling her eyes and how joyous her heart!

"Oh, youth!" whispered the old lady.

There sat the child; she had worked hard for years; she had no home, no devoted mother, no prospects for the future; still youth helped her to be happy, to be gay. It would not last long, for Aunt Ratenow would come with her garden-scissors, and

in her horribly realistic manner would nip off the buds of hope one after another.

Aunt Lott was forced to turn away, and set the tea-pot on the stove, in order that she might gain the mastery over her tears.

"Well, little aunt, how are things here?" cried Elsie, as she drank her tea in haste. "I must go downstairs pretty soon to Aunt Ratenow, Moritz and Frieda."

"Yes, yes, you must, child, yes, yes!" said the old lady. "Though you will not see much of Frieda; they are rehearsing down there in order to give a representation on Aunt Ratenow's birthday, but Moritz will probably have a few minutes to spare."

"Rehearsing? Who?"

"Who, child? Why—the officers and some young ladies from town; afterward they have supper, and the day before yesterday they danced. Goodness gracious! Elsie, I hear Aunt Ratenow's footsteps, and you did not go to see her first!"

"No, it is Moritz!" cried Elsie, and in a trice she hid behind the stove, drawing her skirts closely about her slender form.

Yes, it was Moritz; he had come to ask if Aunt Lott would not like to drive to the station to meet Elsie? Frieda had half of the town downstairs again to supper. As he spoke he sank into the nearest chair and pushed back the hair from his

brow; a gesture peculiar to him when he wanted to exorcise unpleasant thoughts. Suddenly two tiny, trembling hands were laid upon his eyes.

"Uncle Moritz, who am I?" asked a sweet, familiar voice, while the question was accompained by a clear, refreshing laugh.

"You witch!" he exclaimed, holding Elsie fast and rising. "Why, you have grown to be a woman!"

His kindly face beamed. "The food at D— could not have been very poor, truly! And you do not look like a blue-stocking, either, thank God!"

"No, Moritz, my talents do not lie in that direction; but," she added with a consolatory smile, "my examination was excellent!"

His eyes were still riveted upon her.

"Aunt Lott, we are growing old! Once I held this young lady in my arms, and now—"

"Is it not so?" cried Aunt Lott. "As I saw her before me, I was reminded of Schiller's lines," and she forthwith proceeded to quote from her favorite poet.

"That is right," interrupted a deep voice, "put such nonsense in her head at once."

Aunt Ratenow stood upon the threshold, and from behind her peeped Frieda's face wreathed in smiles.

"We came to see if it was true," the latter ex-

claimed. "Caroline declared she had heard Elsie's voice; yes, there she is!"

Elsie had just emerged from the voluminous folds of Aunt Ratenow's shawl which the old lady wore around her on passing through the chilly corridors, when she was pounced upon by the younger lady and kissed boisterously.

"Moritz, do you see, she has come just at the right time. I received a note to-day from Frau von D—; she cannot take part; there has been a death in the family. Now, one difficulty is settled!"

"What is it?" asked Frau von Ratenow sharply.

"I have no time to explain now, mamma; I must go downstairs and you must not ask any questions either," cried Frieda. "Moritz, bring Elsie down with you after awhile," she called out as her graceful form in its blue silk dress disappeared behind the door.

"Well, child," said Aunt Ratenow, turning to the young girl, "we have decided that you shall remain here for the present."

"I shall be delighted—if papa will permit, but, aunt—"

"He will permit," interrupted the old lady. Her words sounded strange. Aunt Lott and Moritz stared at her. "And in order that you—" she continued.

"Let us talk about that to-morrow," said Moritz. "Dear mother," he added, "give us the pleasure of supping with us to-night! Frieda would be so happy to have you."

"You know, Moritz, I cannot endure that eternal chatter," she replied.

"It would be much pleasanter to be alone; but —do me that favor, mother. Aunt Lott and Elsie, get ready to come to the table. Mother and aunt can retire soon after supper; indeed, mother will be requested to."

Frau von Ratenow rose with a shake of her head.

"My poor birthday," said she, "furnishes a pretext for their nonsense—well, you may expect me, Moritz, if matters have gone so far."

"Aunt Lott," said Elsie, as she fastened a pale pink bow upon the simple black cashmere dress, which enhanced the beauty of her fair complexion and flaxen hair, "it is so strange here! Aunt Ratenow is cross, and so is Moritz."

"Yes, but—I do not know why," was the evasive answer she received. "Are you ready? It is time to go."

Elsie replied in the affirmative; together they walked along the hall and descended the stairs.

"Oh, Elsie, my handkerchief!" exclaimed Aunt Lott as they were about to enter the young Rate-

now's apartments. It was customary for her to forget something.

"Go in, aunt, I will fetch it," cried the girl.

In the course of a few moments she again descended the staircase, but paused hesitatingly; not far from her, she saw an officer with a violin-case about to enter the so-called hall. As she hesitated, he looked up and his eyes met hers. As is usual when a gentleman meets a lady in that way, he bowed low, opened the door and allowed the young girl to enter first.

The hall was only dimly lighted, but as Elsie passed through it, she could perceive the change in the once so gloomy room. It had become the fac-simile of an old German state-room, with its dark wainscoting, its elegantly carved furniture, its rich hangings which fell to the ground in such artistic folds, its soft carpets and costly ornaments.

From Frieda's salon issued a flood of light and a chaos of voices. When the young girl appeared in the doorway, the conversation ceased for a moment; introductions followed, and Elsie, unaccustomed to the perfumed, intoxicating atmosphere of the drawing-room, sought refuge with Aunt Lott, behind whose easy-chair stood a vacant seat, from which point of vantage she could gaze with her large, childish eyes upon the unfamiliar, ever-varying panorama before her, consisting of

dazzling uniforms and striking though tasteful toilettes.

Suddenly these words passed from mouth to mouth:

"Bernardi is going to play!"

The officer with whom Elsie had entered, took his violin from its case and consulted earnestly with Frieda; after arranging her lace cuffs carefully, the latter seated herself to the piano, struck a few chords, and silence reigned in the room.

"Bernardi is going to play, Elsie; pay attention," Aunt Lott whispered to the girl. "He plays magnificently."

The next moment from that violin were drawn wonderfully soft, sweet strains—now complaining, now mournful, as if the small brown instrument were weeping, now breaking into a brilliant staccato, into a wild, fiery rhythm. Then it ceased. Elsie started. It seemed to her as if she had awakened from a dream. Applause resounded through the room, and Aunt Ratenow applauded the loudest. "Dear Bernardi," she cried, "it is true, I know nothing of modern music; your father moved me to tears by playing Beethoven's 'Adelaide' upon that same violin; but I must award the palm to you."

She cordially offered him her right hand, which the young man took with a low bow. Then he

held a whispered consultation with Frieda, and the next moment, making another reverence to the old lady, he took up his bow, and the strains of Beethoven's 'Adelaide' floated through the apartment.

"Deutlich shimmert auf jedem purpurblattchen, Adelaide, Adelaide!" murmured aunt Lott, with glowing eyes. "Oh, what a pity, he has finished!"

"Dear Lieutenant Bernardi, how delightful!" Elsie heard the romantic spinster say, as he stood before her, his eyes wandering over her lace cap to Elsie's more pleasing face. They were dark, almost melancholy eyes, which lent his regular face with its black mustache, a peculiar charm. His fellow-officers declared that he was descended from gypsies, from whom, too, he inherited his musical talent.

"Does mademoiselle play?" he asked, placing a chair between Elsie and Aunt Lott.

"I sing a little," she replied; and thus their acquaintance began.

Aunt Lott uttered a few words occasionally for the sake of appearances; she knew absolutely nothing about music; she was indeed greatly surprised to find that Elsie was so well-informed as to thorough-bass, Chopin and Wagner!

Elsie sat next the lieutenant at supper. She did not realize how rapidly the hours flew by.

She saw neither Moritz's smile nor Aunt Ratenow's stern glances. The old lady said to herself; "One can take the girl of to-day out of a corner, put her at the table and she will find something to chatter about."

Then she rose from the table, which was a signal for the guests to rise. When Elsie kissed her hand and wished her a "gesegnete mahlzeit," she siezed the young girl's arm.

"Come with me, child," she said, and without awaiting Frieda's arrival, she passed through Moritz's room to her own. On reaching the cozy apartment she exclaimed: "Well, Elsie, that is over! Gracious heavens, how those women can chatter! Your tongue too can fly! Did you enjoy yourself?"

"Oh, aunt!" The young girl's face was scarlet.

"The only sensible thing was Bernardi's playing," said Frau von Ratenow. "Ring for the maid, Elsie; she must bring me some fresh water and then you can go to bed, child; to-morrow we will have a talk."

"Elsie, where are you?" cried Frieda's voice outside.

"Well, for my part, you can go!" muttered the old lady, and as Frieda the next instant was in the room, she hastily made a motion to Elsie to leave her alone.

"I really believe," said Frieda when they had left the room, "that mamma was going to send you to bed like a child. Come quickly; you must read your part to-night, and later on we are going to dance."

It was long after midnight when Elsie ascended the stairs. She glanced once more over the carved balustrades into the hall in which stood the guests, hooded and cloaked. Bernardi was amongst them and bowed to her.

"Good night!" she cried like a happy child.

She sat for a long time on Aunt Lott's bed telling her of the *pension*, of Sister Beate, and of everything imaginable—they even talked of the dead cat. It was a matter of indifference to her of what she talked for she could not sleep.

V.

The next morning the rain fell in torrents. The cold and dampness seemed to have affected everyone's mood; only Aunt Lott and her foster-daughter arose in good spirits.

"Little aunt, now you are going to take things easy," said she, and when the old lady entered her room, all of her work was already done; the dust had disappeared, the flowers were watered, the bird cared for, and Elsie was at the window in her simple gown, looking out at the rainy landscape.

"I like this sort of weather so much," said she, as they sipped their coffee, "it is so pleasant then indoors; still it is a pity that it is raining. I must go to see papa, Aunt Lott; my conscience was not easly last night, when I was so joyous and I knew that I had not been to see him yet."

She had scarcely uttered those words when some one knocked and Moritz entered. He wore a thick coat of pilot-cloth and high boots.

"I have come," he said, "to ask Elsie if she would like to go to town with me. I have business at the court-house."

Elsie was delighted, and ran to fetch her coat and hat. Moritz looked after her.

"She has grown to be a sweet, pretty girl, Aunt Lott," said he, when the door had closed upon her.

The old lady energetically nodded assent.

"How are all downstairs, Moritz?"

"Frieda is sad; she has received bad news; her father's brother is dead. She never knew him, but the entire family will mourn him, especially as the old gentleman was unmarried and left all of his fortune to my father-in-law. Frieda wants to go to town to make several purchases."

"Eh!" said Aunt Lott, "and your play?"

"That is all done with, thank God," said he, smiling. "Well, Elsie, Frieda will not be ready for some time," he added, turning to the girl who had just re-entered the room; "you can bid mother 'good day' in the meantime."

Frau von Ratenow was seated at the window, sorting an immense pile of stockings, spectacles upon nose.

"You are very dutiful, Elsie," said she in the course of the conversation, and much gentler than was her custom; "Old people are peculiar, however, and you must not think that your father does not love you, if he tells you he is willing to have you remain with us. He may seem to you, and to others, hard and unfeeling, but the cause lies in

his disappointed life, in the reserve with which he envelops himself. Perhaps, in time, he will become more approachable. Remember me to your father!" she called after her as the girl stood at the door.

Frieda was evidently in a very ill-humor. She lay back in the carriage wrapped in her soft, fur mantle, and did not speak a word for sometime.

At length she took from her pocket a dainty purse and emptied its contents into her silk handkerchief.

"This will not be sufficient, Moritz," she said toying with the gold-pieces; "you must settle the bill at Drewendt's; I will have what I get to-day charged."

Without a word, he took out his pocket-book and silently gave her a couple of bank-notes; she took them, put them in her porte-monnaie with the other money and returned it to her pocket.

"Moritz, may I buy that little etagere for my drawing-room?" she asked, looking imploringly at him with her blue eyes.

He turned toward his wife impatiently, but his angry expression disappeared as he gazed upon the pretty face which smiled so bewitchingly from beneath the dark fur cap.

"How much pleasure such things afford you," said he. "Get it, for all I care. Pretty soon we

shall have to have a sale; we have so much furniture! what will the etagere cost?"

"Oh, not so very much; a hundred marks, perhaps, Moritz."

Her husband did not reply. The carriage drew up at the major's, and Elsie alighted.

She traversed the hall, ascended the steep staircase, paused in hesitation at her father's door, and then entered the kitchen first.

Old Siethmann had just placed a couple of wine-glasses on a tray and with trembling hands was trying to uncork a bottle of Rhine wine.

"Give it to me," said Elsie, with a smile, "I am stronger than you."

"Heavenly Father!" cried the woman joyfully. "Elsie! Miss Elsie! How you have grown! That is the way; we have had no visitors for ten years and now they come from all corners."

Elsie put the bottle of wine on the salver.

"Who is with papa, Dora? I should not like to disturb him."

"You shall guess!" cried the old woman, putting on a clean apron. "Ah, you are curious too, Elsie, just as your mother was!—well—" she drew nearer the girl—"it is the owner of Bennewitz! I did not recognize him," she continued; "a fine gentleman in a black suit came to the door and asked for his cousin, the major. Had I told your

father first, he would surely have not received him; so I opened the door, ushered him in, and left them together. Now let them fight it out, Elsie; it will do no harm, for they have been like cat and dog toward each other a number of years, owing to the inheritance. And now, would you like to carry in the wine, Elsie?"

"Did papa order wine?" asked the girl.

"Lord! He never thinks of anything like that!" replied the old woman with a shrug of her shoulders. "I thought that when a relative called, that was only proper."

At that instant the sound of the major's deep voice penetrated to the kitchen, and Siethmann, who was in the act of handing the girl the tray, set it down again in affright.

"Oh, Lord! Elsie, he is angry!" she stammered.

In a trice Elsie crossed the corridor, opened a door and stood upon the threshold of the room whence issued the angry words.

"Papa, am I disturbing you?" she asked, approaching the old man who, pausing in the middle of the room, a letter in his hand, his face crimson with rage, stared at her as if she were an apparition.

The stately man, who leaned almost carelessly against the window, did not bear the slightest resemblance to his furious cousin.

"You are certainly not disturbing us, Fraulein von Hegebach," said he with a bow. "It is a pleasant interruption. I was just trying to explain a misunderstanding and it was rendered very difficult by the cropping up of fresh complications."

"Papa!" The sweet, young creature threw both arms about the morose, old man. "Dear papa, I am so glad to be with you again!" And she clung more closely to him as if to protect him from the injuries of the world.

Major von Hegebach was apparently not himself; with one hand he stroked his daughter's fair hair and with the other he pushed her away.

"After awhile, my child, after awhile; I have something to say to this gentleman."

"The young lady will not disturb us, cousin! We can sit down and settle the matter quietly as men should in the presence of a lady," said the owner of Bennewitz, drawing his chair up to the table littered with cigar-boxes and newspapers.

"If you please, Wilhelm," he continued, placing a chair likewise for Elsie, "let us talk the matter over calmly. You know I did not come here in a quarrelsome mood, and you know, too, which of us has the heaviest burden to bear."

Hegebach had seated himself, at an imploring gesture from Elsie, and for a moment silence reigned in the old smoky room.

"Neither of us, Wilhelm," began Hegebach's cousin once more, "can help it that your uncle—God forgive him—made such a will; it cannot be set aside. Your claims—that you must have known before you made them, or your lawyer should have told you so—are not valid. I have not the right to divide the estate and fortune which now belongs to me, but I *have* the right to make the proposition afore-mentioned and which I made in good faith. Accept it, Wilhelm, if not for your own sake, for that of your child."

"I shall not accept it," said the major, doggedly, "I shall await future developments."

"For God's sake, be reasonable, Wilhelm," besought his cousin, casting a glance at the young girl.

"I know my own business, thank you!" With trembling hands the old man took up a package of papers, laid them in another place, and opened and shut the lid of a cigar-box with nervous haste.

Elsie looked helplessly from one to the other.

"We have to deal with very material things," said the owner of Bennewitz to the young girl. "Your father has an idea that since Fate robbed me of both my sons and at the same time took away the heirs to the family estate he has claims upon them. I do not see how he could legally present such claims; in any case he has been ill-

advised. I came here to-day in order to prevent the commencement of a suit so utterly hopeless and, too, to—"

"To put a plaster over my mouth!" interrupted the major vehemently. "Many thanks once more for your offer."

The visitor rose.

"I meant well, Wilhelm; it never occurred to me to try to force you. Follow your own inclinations if you will."

He took his hat with its broad band of crape, from the chair upon which he had placed it, and offered his hand to the young girl. "It would afford me great pleasure could I next meet my dear cousin under more agreeable circumstances. Adieu, Fraulein von Hegebach," and the door closed upon him.

"Papa!" said Elsie sadly, as the old man, seemingly unconscious of her presence, rummaged among the letters and papers in the drawers of his secretary, "Papa!" Hegebach started and rubbed his brow.

"Papa, I should like to have a talk with you."

He paused in his search and stared at her.

"Papa, I only wanted to tell you that I would gladly come to you, keep house for you, read aloud to you evenings and take care of your room."

There must have been something in her voice

which forced him to listen to her. He sank into a chair and leaned his head upon his hand. "And I would so gladly nurse you when you have your attacks of the gout, and you would not be alone for—Aunt Ratenow—" The clear, girlish voice changed suddenly to tones of sadness and anxiety. "Let me remain with you, papa. I am so sorry for you!" she cried, throwing her arms around his neck. "You are alone so much, you cannot be happy!"

"No, Elsie, it cannot be," he replied, but he did not shrink from her embrace. "You would have no luck, poor child, with such a beggar for your father! It might have been different! But he whom Fate has mounted upon a worn-out nag, will never obtain a decent horse. I have told Aunt Ratenow how much I have to live upon; twenty dollars a month! It sounds comical, does it not? The rest is deducted from my pension for debts of long standing which it will take years to pay!"

"Papa!" she cried, but he continued, not heeding the interruption.

"It is best, as Frau von Ratenow proposed to me yesterday. You will instruct the little Ratenows and receive a fair salary in return; there, too, you will be as one of the family. That is far better than hundreds of others have it in your position, and—as for the rest, we shall see!" he concluded.

The young girl sprang up and glanced at the speaker with pallid cheeks. She said not a word. Suddenly it dawned upon her that that golden, happy youth so free from care was to be hers no longer. The dear old home of her childhood seemed to her enveloped in gray shadows; she had no rights there. She had at a blow passed from the position of a child of the house to one of servitude! Ah, how could she have thought that anything in the world would be given for nothing! They had educated a governess for themselves, that was all. A feeling of infinite bitterness filled the girl's heart; it was not caused by the fear of work; it was the pain of a great disappointment.

"Adieu, papa!" said she, putting on her hat, "I will visit you as often as—" she hesitated; in her bitterness she was about to say, "as often as my employers will permit—" but recalling Moritz's kindly face, she corrected herself and said: "as often as I can."

He gave her his hand. "Things will be better some day, Elsie; you are young yet."

She nodded.

"Adieu, papa!" Then she left him.

With what different feelings had she entered the house! She stood at the door with a clouded brow; the elegant carriage which had brought her thither

was just turning the corner. Moritz was coming to fetch her; she must await him.

"How you do look, Elsie!" he cried, as he alighted to help her to enter the vehicle. "Did he scold you?" He tried to take her hand.

"When do you want me to begin to teach the children?" was her reply, as the carriage rolled along with them. "Do you not wish to examine my certificates first?"

He raised his eyes; her voice sounded so strange, her lips were painfully compressed.

"To teach the children?" he repeated. "Ah yes; mother, I believe, was going to ask you to instruct the little ones in the rudiments! Will you, Elsie?"

"It has all been settled," she replied. "I was not consulted."

"Have your feelings been hurt, Elsie? If they have, it was unintentional, believe me," said he, gently gazing into the girl's pale face.

She looked at him with tearful eyes.

"Moritz, I will do anything by day or night for your children, but do not offer me money—I cannot bear it!" she sobbed.

"Elsie! Elsie! you have a mistaken idea of it all," he cried, startled. And as, at that moment the carriage drew up at the door he said: "Pray go to Aunt Lott, Elsie; I wish to see mother a few minutes. I will soon join you."

Elsie stood in her room and looked out at the rain and storm; she no longer wept, she was calm. The affairs of the day before lay far behind her; it seemed to her that she had been dreaming. Why had she forgotten Aunt Ratenow's oft-repeated words when she was still a child:

"You must study in order to make yourself independent." Who, however, thinks of the necessity of working when among merry young companions, when life seems like a May morning?

"Elsie!" some one exclaimed.

She turned. Aunt Ratenow stood before her.

"I am sorry, Elsie, that you misinterpreted that which we meant kindly. I cannot spare your feelings, I must repeat. Your circumstances are not such that you can go through life like a gay butterfly; you must become an industrious bee. If you undertake the instruction of our children, it stands to reason that you will receive remuneration for it as would any stranger; it is false pride to refuse it, and should you think it over, you would understand it to be such. Life is long, my child; I will therefore not give you the detested money, but will save it for you in order that you may have a little nest-egg. But, Elsie, no one shall force you to this. You are a guest in my house, and will remain one as long as it pleases you to do so; the decision remains with you."

"I accept," said the girl, softly.

"That is right, Elsie. Everything will be just as it was. How is your father?"

"He was excited; he had a disagreement with his cousin from Bennewitz; I met him at papa's."

"His cousin from Bennewitz?" exclaimed Frau von Ratenow, in so loud a voice that the girl looked at her in affright. "And you say it so carelessly! Did he see you?"

"Yes, aunt!"

"What was he doing there?"

Elsie did not reply immediately; at length she said: "He came on account of Bennewitz; father is going to try to obtain a portion of it by law."

"Is he mad?" cried the old lady with rage. Then remembering that the man's daughter was before her, she added: "You do not understand, Elsie; I do not mean just that! I must have a talk with your father; he will get into a fine mess." She patted the girl's cheek. "We will make this room very cozy for the winter," she said, without awaiting an answer.

"Aunt Lott," said the young girl, with a sad smile, entering the old maid's home-like apartments later on, "if I should forget one thing again, will you please remind me of it?"

"Of what, my rose-bud?"

"That I am a poor girl!"

VI.

Elsie did not succeed in thinking of it all the time. The next morning she wandered through the garden, and every tree nodded to her and asked: "Do you still remember me?" Every spot in which she had played when a child whispered its sweet words to her sorrowful heart; the sun shone so clearly and brightly over the stately old house; she knew every roof, every windmill, every hill far and near! She was at home; she was not poor! How could she cherish only melancholy thoughts amid so much pleasure, beauty and happiness? It was so cozy in the pretty dining-room with its bountifully spread board, so pleasant, when Aunt Ratenow told some anecdote of the past; it was like a ray of sunshine when Frieda laughed and the children joined in so merrily, and Moritz sat at the head of the table, carving the roast and caring for everyone.

"Elsie, are you never hungry anymore? Come, eat, little girl! try this tempting bit of lamb! That is right; is it good?"

After dinner he took the little boy upon his back,

and then followed a romp up and down the garden path, all participating, laughing and frolicking, until Frieda cried: "Stop, Moritz!" Then there were the excursions to the woods with Frieda and Aunt Ratenow. Occasionally, too, young Frau von Ratenow's coupe drove through the village, and the clerks in the shops to which she was going, to make purchases, opened the door respectfully, and helped the ladies to alight. In the evening there was always company at the castle, and John knocked at Aunt Lott's door to ask if "Fraulein von Hegebach would not come downstairs awhile? How rapidly did the small hands arrange the perfumed hair, and place the pink bow among the curly locks, especially when the old man added; "There is to be music."

The beginning of Elsie's duties was still deferred. She did not know that Mortiz said secretly to his wife: "Frieda, you do not want the children to commence their studies before January!" And when Elsie asked the young mother to set the time for her to enter upon her work, Frieda very quietly replied that there was time enough to think about that: she could not think of shutting up the children before the second of January; Moritz had, too, to arrange a school-room for them.

Aunt Ratenow's arguments were of no avail, for Frieda's opinions had to be respected as well as

the old lady's. And Moritz?—oh, he was henpecked, the old lady said to Aunt Lott, when within her *sanctum sanctorum.*

Elsie had met her former school-mate, Fraulein Annie Cramm, in Freida's charming blue drawing-room. Annie had been in society two years. Her thin face was as pale and expressionless as ever, and her hair of the same straw-color.

"She is a goose," said Frieda very frankly.

"But with golden plumage, dear child," added Aunt Ratenow; "that covers a multitude of sins."

As Annie had a "still small" soprano voice, she was frequently invited to Frieda's musical evenings. She preferred singing solos, and invariably appeared in a fine costume not always suited to the occasion, which costume often aroused the scornful ridicule of her young hostess. Elsie's black cashmere was looked upon as "tolerably becoming" by Frieda. But what could the latter do? At first she proposed replenishing the girl's more than simple wardrobe from her own, but she was opposed in that by her usually so pliant husband.

"If Elsie needs anything," he said, "mother will attend to it as she always has; moreover what should she do with your cast-off clothes—she is a head taller than you? I do not want her to wear them either, Frieda! Why stamp her with the brand of poverty?" And so the fair, slender girl

wore the simple, black gown which enhanced her peculiar charm.

Matters went so far in the Ratenow household that twice a week on certain days lights burned upon the piano, and, from four o'clock in the afternoon until midnight, music was heard.

"I can do nothing but play on a comb," said Moritz one afternoon as Elsie, descending the stairs with a book of music, met him in the hall, "and whistle 'Heil dis im Siregerkranz.' But I am always prompt at supper, and when afterward a couple of songs are sung, I gladly listen to them. I understand none of your symphonies! Good-bye, Elsie; save a few songs for me."

As Moritz had nothing to do out of doors, he sought his mother, lighted a cigar and seated himself in his father's arm-chair. Mother and son never lacked a subject upon which to converse; they always took counsel together as to the management of their affairs; the practical old lady had always good advice to give, and they were soon deep in an agricultural discussion; then they talked over several scandals about town; and finally Moritz told her that a few days before he had seen Hegebach's cousin at Magdeburg, and that the latter had told him that the major had brought suit against him.

"I don't care," said Frau von Ratenow, "the

stubborn fellow must learn by experience. I have talked and written to him until I am tired, but he clings to his supposed rights with a tenacity worthy of a better cause."

She paused, but her knitting-needles continued to click; nothing vexed the old lady more than to have anyone disregard her advice.

"Tell me, my boy," she asked bluntly, "is it really only the desire to play that brings the dark lieutenant here so often with his fiddle?"

"Presumably so," replied Moritz: "they do nothing else; they even forget to eat and drink."

"Do you know, Moritz, I shall not take your word for it; in such matters you are like a child; I shall have to look into it myself sometime."

"Oh, mother! Aunt Lott is always present with her knitting."

"She is just the right one," interrupted Frau von Ratenow, half in jest, half in earnest. "She is a kind soul; but, notwithstanding her years, she would be the first to fall in love with Bernardi."

Moritz laughed heartily.

"It is really no laughing matter, my son! You fell desperately in love once, did you not? And others, too, have eyes in their heads and young blood in their veins." As she spoke, she took her spotless tulle cap from her head, and stroking her still glossy brown hair, she added: "Give me the

cap with the lilac ribbons out of my drawer, Moritz. Yes, that is the one, thank you; now let us join the musicians!"

The young man closed the drawer, and brushed some dust from his dark-blue coat.

"Mother, if you think Elsie—"

"I think nothing, Moritz! Are you going with me?"

"Certainly! You must see that no love-potions are being prepared, you overanxious mother."

In the salon, candles and lamps were lighted: the "Kreutzer Sonata" had just been performed, and those assembled in the room were discussing its rendition when mother and son entered. Frieda sat at the piano trying over several difficult measures; Lieutenant Bernardi had laid down his violin, and was standing beside Elsie, who was turning the pages of a music portfolio.

Annie Cramm and Aunt Lott sat near the window; the cheeks of all were crimson with excitement.

"We should like to hear a couple of songs!" thus Moritz explained his and his mother's unexpected appearance, while Aunt Ratenow seated herself in a corner beside Aunt Lott with a sonorous: "Good evening, ladies, good evening, dear Bernardi!"

Moritz smiled to himself; his dear, old mother

was no diplomatist; she plunged straight ahead. It afforded him unspeakable amusement to watch her.

Fraulien Annie Cramm was prevailed upon to sing. Elsie quietly withdrew to the deep bay-window, and her sweet, flower-like face looked forth from the heavy blue hangings which formed a charming background for her fair head. Bernardi had taken his station on the other side of the room; he leaned against Frieda's book-case, in the shadow, just opposite Elsie.

"A handsome, young fellow," confessed Frau von Ratenow in secret; "so tall and well-built, with such polished manners; it would be no wonder if—"

Annie Cramm's song had come to an end; the old lady's soliloquy was interrupted; she turned to the singer and said: "Very pretty, my dear young lady! But I could not understand it!"

"Mamma! what high treason—that was Wagner!" cried Frieda.

"I know nothing about him!" was the reply, given with imperturbable composure.

"You see, that is because you never go to the theater with us when we are in Berlin," complained Frieda.

"Child, I have always prided myself upon my nerves, but there I tremble in every limb after the

first act, and have only one thought: will they not stop soon? You who are always talking of your *nerves* can stand such a din for hours! Elsie, will you not sing us a simple ballad?"

The young girl with blushing cheeks advanced to the piano.

"Let us try the old words with the new melody," proposed Frieda, and after she had struck the opening chords, a soft, full contralto sang a touching ballad. At its conclusion, the old lady, extending her hand to the girl, cried: "Bravo, Elsie!"

The others were silent. Bernardi seized his violin and began to play the simple, plaintive chords, then followed a soft accompaniment with the principal melody running through it. The eyes of the young couple were riveted upon each other as he played; then the humid, brown eyes of the maiden were cast down, and the blush upon her cheeks gave place to pallor; in silence she seated herself beside Aunt Lott. Bernardi laid down his violin and listened to the praises with which he was overwhelmed. At first Aunt Ratenow did not speak, then she said: "It is an old song set to a new melody; did you not say so, Frieda? Elsie!" she cried as they repaired to the dining-room and the young girl was about to take her seat beside Bernardi, "Elsie! let Moritz or

Aunt Lott sit there, and you come to me; I have the rheumatism in my arm again."

Elsie was ready at once, but Moritz looked at his mother in astonishment; he had a horror of such stratagem—and it was all so unnecessary, he thought.

It was late when they rose from the table; the carriage had waited a long time outside in the storm for Fraulein Annie Cramm; she wrapped herself in her fur mantle and said farewell in the hall.

"Lieutenant, may I offer you a seat in my carriage," she asked.

Bernardi was standing before Elsie, speaking to her, his cap beneath his arm. The room was only dimly lighted, but Annie could see nevertheless how he raised a slender, half-resisting hand to his lips.

"Will you drive with me, lieutenant?" she asked again impatiently; "it is already very late and I am in a hurry."

"Thank you, Fraulein Cramm; the walk will be good for me; I prefer it to riding," he replied with his most gallant bow.

Annie Cramm drew her veil over her pale face and forgot to bid Elsie Hegebach adieu. Moritz conducted her to her carriage and then shook hands with the young officer who was just descending the steps. He paused a moment, gazed after the

officer, looked across the court-yard, then at the sky, and finally at two windows on the upper floor through which a light glimmered.

Softly he whistled a few measures of "Boccaccio," and walked toward home.

"Frieda," said he to the pretty little woman who was closing the piano in the drawing-room, "is there not something in the wind?"

"Now, you have made another discovery, eh, Moritz?" she replied with a laugh.

"Yes, between Bernardi and—"

"Nonsense, she is too ugly," she interrupted.

"No, no; I mean Elsie!"

"Ah, great heavens!" she replied imperturbably, "if that is all you know—that is an utter impossibility; he has no thought of such a thing."

"But if she, Elsie—"

"Ah, heavens! I had two lovers before you, Moritz, and I am alive still."

"It would be shameful," said he, putting his hand over his eyes.

Upstairs at the window sat a girl, her hands pressed to her throbbing heart. She was not poor; she was so rich that she would not have changed places with anyone on earth! Ah, was it possible that life could be so beautiful? Was it possible that someone could love her so dearly that his eyes plainly told her of his love?

She sat there a long time, and gazed at the lights in the village until one after another went out. She could hear Aunt Lott's regular breathing; she slept so soundly and so peacefully that she forgot to rise and say to her, as she constantly forgot: "Child, of what are you dreaming? You are only a poor girl!"

VII.

Winter had come—at Christmas-time the snow lay white and glistening upon the ground, and on the roofs of the houses; and on New Year's day it snowed still. The roads and streets were as smooth as a polished floor, and Moritz had his horses rough shod: there was to be a large sleighing-party.

Young Frau von Ratenow, in a dark-blue velvet costume trimmed with fur, was drawing on her gloves before the mirror in her bedroom.

She looked sweet enough to kiss, Moritz declared. He said he should be delighted with the whole affair if that miserable Bernardi did not want to take Elsie. His wife shrugged her shoulders.

"That eternal care for Elsie! Mamma talks of nothing else and neither do you! Is she any better than all the other girls?"

"Yes," replied Moritz warmly. "She has an affectionate, clinging disposition. Trifling and coquetry are strangers to her."

"You seem to have made a study of that girl's nature," was the reply, made with apparent calmness, but Moritz knew the tones of that voice too

well not to perceive that the speaker was provoked.

"Frieda, I am surprised at you! I have known her since her earliest childhood, as I know our own children!"

His honest eyes glanced almost in terror at his wife's glowing cheeks. She calmly buttoned the last button of her long gloves and took up her dainty muff.

"I believe the gentlemen are in the salon," said she, gliding past him, not heeding in the least that a man's hand was held out to her. It was not the first time that his wife had spoken to him thus; it was, according to her opinion, unbearable that all should be so anxious about that girl, who indeed had had a very easy time of it in the world. Who would pay her any attention were she at home with her fretful father? Mamma Ratenow always said she wanted to guard against any accidents, and Moritz, of course, echoed her words. It became monotonous: what harm did it do if an officer was attentive to her? There was amusement in it, and no danger for Bernardi—and—Elsie. Absurd! An angry flush suffused her cheeks as she entered the salon to greet Captain von Trauben and Lieutenant Bernardi.

The former, a very handsome man and a great admirer of young Frau von Ratenow's, fell upon

his knee and offered his lady a bunch of pale yellow roses.

Elsie, her face aglow with delight, held in her hand a bouquet of violets.

"Oh, Frieda, see! Snow and ice, and those lovely flowers! It is like a dream."

Like a dream, like a sweet dream was life! The sun shone so brightly upon the snow-covered country, the air was so clear and cold, so wonderfully pure, the sleigh-bells jingled, and the sleigh flew so merrily on. How beautiful the world looks when one's heart is filled with happiness!

The young girl's eyes grew sad only once: that was as they passed the "Rosengasse," and she glanced up at the house in which her father lived. He was standing at the window in his dressing-gown and cap, but he did not return his daughter's nod and smile.

Papa was lost in thought; he did not even know that he had a daughter!

The band played and the young couple chatted of nothing in particular; still to them it seemed a great deal.

"My Christian name is Bernhard," he said, carefully arranging the robe about the slender, girlish form.

"Bernhard Bernardi; that sounds very pretty."

"Your cousin provides for our entertainment,"

he continued. "We are to have a dance at the castle to-night. They are charming people, indeed!"

"Where is Annie Cramm? Who is her escort?" asked Elsie.

He laughed, and his white teeth glistened beneath his black mustache.

"Ensign Herbart was commissioned to look after her!"

"What a shame! Annie is so good!"

"Good? Is that all? That is very little!"

"It is a great deal, sir," said the young girl, her child-like eyes assuming a grave expression.

He feasted his eyes upon her until he was familiar with every feature of that pure, fresh face; it was delightful to drive beside that charming creature, who was so different from other girls—so—so—he scarcely knew how to express himself—so simple-hearted, so womanly throughout. As he looked at her, he was reminded of his home and of his mother; he was standing in the old-fashioned sitting-room and she was by his side.

Moritz was in the last sleigh with a pretty young lady. He was vexed, and his glances alternated between Frieda and Elsie.

"Fraulein von Hegebach is a long way ahead, Herr von Ratenow. Bernardi is driving her. Is he not at your house a great deal? I am acquainted with one of his sisters; his father was for-

merly a physician here. He is said to have a large practice at B—, but he has nothing besides. So many children, you know, Herr von Ratenow."

"I know his circumstances," replied Moritz. He knew very well what his companion was hinting at.

"Is that so? Pardon me, dearest Herr von Ratenow," said the lady looking at him in astonishment.

Then the Ratenows knew he was not a good match! In the meantime all was topsy-turvy at the castle, as old Frau von Ratenow complained to Aunt Lott. In the drawing-room the tables were being laid, and the gardener brought half of the conservatory into the hall in which there was to be a dance. Promptly on the first of January, Frieda had discarded her mourning and that was to be the first entertainment, although an impromptu one. The evening before she returned home from a soiree with the plan, and the next day very early, all in the house were set at work.

"Let me have peace," said Frau von Ratenow to her daughter-in-law. "Send the children to me that they may not be in your way; that is all I shall have to do with it!"

In Frieda's bedroom lay the elegant pale-blue silk dress, with every requisite for her toilette.

In Elsie's chamber Aunt Lott had laid the simple white silk gown which the girl had received for

a Christmas present; here and there, the old lady had tacked a pink bow; it was no small matter to prepare her foster-child for her first dance.

Then she herself put on her gray silk, lighted the lamp, and took up one of Hacklander's novels, in order to while away the time until Elsie's arrival, when she should assist her, for her toliette would have to be hastily made.

Gradually the tumult below subsided, the preparations were all completed, the calm which always precedes a storm had set in.

Sleigh-bells jingled without—there were Moritz, Frieda and Elsie, with the entire party. In a few moments the young girl's light footsteps were heard in the corridor, the door opened and there she stood—rosy and out of breath.

"Good evening, my dear little auntie," she cried, throwing both arms around the old lady's neck.

She brought into the room with her a wave of wonderfully fresh, cool air!

"Was it nice, Mousie? Did you enjoy yourself? Come, drink your tea!"

But the young girl hastily declined; she ran into her bedroom, and stood there a long time in the dark, forgetting to lay aside her hat and cloak! Aunt Lott entered to help her.

"Why, Elsie, you are standing here yet, and it is high time to begin to dress!"

She brought a light and took the girl's wraps off.

"What is it, Elsie, are you crying?"

She did not reply, but began to dress. That day she could not arrange her hair at all; her trembling fingers opened the heavy plaits three times, and the rose would not stay in place.

"It looks very pretty; it is all right," said Aunt Lott. "You are not usually so vain!"

Ah, usually, good Aunt Lott! You had no idea for whom Elsie was adorning herself. At length she was ready.

"Aunt Lott, I do not feel well to-day."

She trembled nervously.

"What is the matter, child? You took cold in the sleigh."

"No, no, come, auntie!"

"Will you not have a few drops of eau de cologne?"

She did not reply, but stood there motionlessly, staring into space. She fancied she heard her name: "Elsie!" and these simple words: "Happiness! This very moment is happiness to me!" His voice had trembled as he uttered them.

On the way home, he talked to her of his parents, of how kind and good his mother was, and how she loved to hear him play upon his violin. His father too had played in days gone by. He

remembered very distinctly how, when a child, he had sat upon his mother's knee at dusk, listening attentively as his father paced the room and drew music from his violin. Occasionally he dropped his bow and crossed the room to kiss mother and child. Ah, yes, the little violin had witnessed much happiness, therefore it sang so sweetly. "Happiness! This very moment is happiness to me!" Suddenly their hands met and Elsie wept; but through her tears her innocent, young heart rejoiced; above their heads stretched the heavens bright with stars.

"Elsie, come, I beseech you," implored Aunt Lott; "I believe we are the last ones."

Elsie followed the old lady as if in a dream; she dreaded meeting *him* again, in the glare of the candle-light, and her heart throbbed violently.

The brightly-lighted ball-room and the adjoining salon were filled with people; card-tables had been set up in Moritz's room, and Frau von Ratenow had a pack of cards in her hand.

She was conversing with an elderly gentleman when Elsie approached to kiss her hand. The old lady glanced at her an instant in surprise; she was so lovely that evening; almost timidly she patted her cheek, and her eyes followed her as she made her way through the throng, her head somewhat bowed, her perfect form clad in the well-fitting white gown.

She paused beside Annie Cramm. That young lady in her lilac dress, beflounced with lace and ornamented with flowers, looked as if a modiste had dressed a wax figure and stood it in the window on exhibition. Everything was so exquisite, from the pale lilac satin slippers to the costly point-lace fan and the diamond butterfly, which sparkled so pretentiously on the young lady's slender throat.

"What a rigging the fashions of to-day are," murmured Frau von Ratenow. "I am surprised that Annie Cramm can dance in such tight skirts. Great heavens! How they look!"

The first measures of a waltz floated through the apartment; electrically, so it seemed, couples sprang up.

"Where is Elsie, Lott? I do not see her anymore," said the old lady.

"There, there!" cried Aunt Lott, who had just stepped up. "Ratenow, the child does not dance, she flies!" she cried ecstatically, watching her pet with sparkling eyes.

"At eighteen one enjoys such pastime!" remarked an old gentleman with gold spectacles.

"Tell me, judge, are you not the Bennewitz Hegebach's lawyer?"

"I am, madame."

"Well?"

"Well, the major's suit, of course, was dismissed."

"Of course," said Frau von Ratenow, "does he know of it?"

"He will be informed of it to-day. I am curious to know how it will affect him."

Frau von Ratenow looked anxiously at the speaker. "Do you think it will satisfy him?"

"Heavens, no!" replied the lawyer. "As long as the old lunatic has breath in his body he will croak."

The waltz was ended, the dancers sought other rooms or the more tempting nooks in the conservatory.

Bernardi conducted Elsie to Frieda's boudoir. No one was there but the two fair-haired children, who were seated upon the sofa looking at one of their mamma's pretty books. Frieda's large dog stood intelligently by.

Elsie seated herself in a low chair beside the children and began to talk to them. The elder laid the book upon her knee. It was a charming picture, and she felt Bernardi's eyes resting admiringly upon her. She looked up, their eyes met, and she, with a deep blush, lowered her lashes.

"We shall soon begin our lessons," said the young girl, stroking the elder child's hair.

"I can read already, Aunt Elsie; listen!"

And pointing with her tiny finger to the large

letters, she read the lines printed beneath the picture:

"Love conquers all things!" "You lie!" said mammon.

Elsie glanced at the engraving. A bridal procession was ascending the church steps, a young patrician was leading his elegantly-attired bride into the sacred edifice; the couple were followed by their aristocratic relatives. To one side stood a girl, poorly-clad, her only ornament two long plaits of golden hair; her back was turned to the wedding-party; she was holding her apron to her face and weeping.

Bernardi looked over Elsie's shoulder. The child asked how uncle liked the picture. He did not reply.

"Bernardi—a word with you," suddenly said Lieutenant von Rost.

He crossed the room and joined his comrade.

"What do you want, Rost?" he asked.

"Bernardi," said the officer, taking his glass out of his eye, "you and I have always been frank with one another. I shall be so to-day. Obtain a leave-of-absence, get transferred, or marry Annie Cramm—"

Bernardi turned pale even to his lips.

"You must speak more plainly, Rost!"

"More plainly? Gladly! You have debts, my

friend; you have no expectations; you do not seem to be very observant or you would have seen by Ratenow's constrained manner toward you how your frequent visits to his house were construed. Of course, I do not know how far you have gone, nor if you can honorably draw back; if such be the case, you may be sure of my sympathy."

Without another word, he passed his brother-officer and advanced to Elsie who was still listening to the children's prattle.

"This is our dance, I believe, fraulein?" said he, and he led Elsie into the ball-room.

Bernardi remained behind. With a clouded brow he made his way through the room to the ball-room and paused at the door just beside Moritz. Truly, the usually so affable man was noticeably distant to him. He stroked his mustache, and mentally ran over his list of relations. Rost was right—he had no expectations!

"Oh, colonel!" he suddenly heard Frau von Ratenow say, "that is a matter of opinion." He turned and looked into the card-room. The old lady, in her heavy silk dress, sat opposite the colonel at the nearest whist-table; she was dealing the cards, and her face wore that stern expression peculiar to it when she was preparing for a dispute.

"Those are not my views," she continued. "I have seen too much misery arise from such cases.

I will cite an example." She finished dealing the cards and laid her folded hands upon them. It seemed to Bernardi that she spoke so loudly because she perceived him at the door. Involuntarily he listened.

"She was my friend, colonel! You surely knew Major von Welsleben and his wife? Well, they met and loved when he was a stripling and she was a mere child. At that age one does not think of the prose of life, you were about to say, colonel? Very well, then it is our duty to awaken the young people from the romantic dream of 'Love in a cottage,' and to represent to them that one cannot live upon love and the perfume of roses alone. Well, this boy and girl entered into an engagement and were finally married. Children came, their means grew more and more limited, duns came from all sides, there was no happiness in the home, and whenever the bell rang the wife started in affright, for she feared it might be one of those often-presented, but never settled accounts. She grew sickly and miserable, and he took more pleasure in frequenting the ale-houses than was good for him. Now, let me ask you, sir, where—"

Bernardi heard no more; he approached Frieda and asked for an "extra." She replied:

"My dear Bernardi, take pity on Fraulein Cramm."

He made her a low bow and left the room.

Elsie's brown eyes seemed to be seeking something. Lieutenant Rost knew what it was; he felt inexpressibly sorry for the girl. He would have liked to have charmed up a few thousand dollars for Bernardi in order that those tiny feet might trip along beside him in the path of life, for upon his honor, he thought, she was charming.

Bernardi, in the meantime, was pacing up and down the garden path. "If you can draw back—" rang in his ears. His brain reeled; it seemed to him as if he could have strangled him who uttered those words. They were to the point, and that was the worst of it! Could he draw back without any *eclat?* He would not break his word, for there had been no spoken understanding. And yet, she must have read a thousand times in his eyes, as he had read in her clear, brown, child-like ones, that she loved him and he loved her. But what a prospect! The old lady's example was so horribly comfortless, so horribly true—a miserable perspective!

He pushed his hair from his brow, and the picture he had seen a short while before reoccurred to him, and the weeping maiden assumed the form of Elsie von Hegebach. No, he could not draw back, nor did he wish to; he could not live if Elsie von Hegebach were to think him faithless! He

held love and women too sacred; there must be some expedient; if things came to the worst, he would sell out. Hastily he returned to the house and passed through the ball to the card-room.

"Madame," he said, bowing to old Frau von Ratenow, "may I have a few words with you?" He spoke softly and looked calmly into the shrewd face which turned toward him in surprise. She did not reply immediately, but she laid down her cards.

"Go into my sitting-room; I will follow you," she said after a pause.

It was well that the others were conversing in such loud tones and that the musicians were playing. Frau von Ratenow looked after him as he disappeared behind the portieres.

"Now it is coming," she said to herself; "dear judge, will you take my hand for fifteen minutes? Thank you!"

And passing through the ball-room, she followed the young officer to her room, which was only lighted by a single candle, and from out the uncertain light of which a grave, pale face gazed at her.

"Well, dear Bernardi?"

"Gracious madame, a few moments since you uttered a severe opinion as to—" He hesitated.

"I know what you mean," she said. "You do not wish me to recant, do you?"

The words sounded jocular, but her eyes were grave, almost severe.

"Madame, is not an exception possible?" he asked.

"No," she returned briefly, seating herself in the nearest chair.

"Not if an honest, firm will is combined with a heart full of love?"

He spoke with emotion; the old lady looked at him almost compassionately.

"Gracious heavens! They all think, they all believe that."

"I would give up my commission, madame. Our position requires us to keep up appearances; it is a miserable lot, that of a poor officer! I would never offer it to Elsie von Hegebach, I—"

"Elsie von Hegebach?" Frau von Ratenow rose and approached the young man. "If you are thinking of Elsie von Hegebach, I can tell you that she is a poor girl; that she would never consent to have a man give up his profession for her sake in order to drag out a discontented, disappointed existence with her! She is much too discreet for that, my dear Bernardi; and I am convinced that you are too honorable to make such a proposition to a child who does not yet know what it means to bind oneself forever. As yet she has not known anything of the hardships of life." She spoke

emphatically, adding: "Do you think that when you have discarded your gay uniform, you can live like an ordinary day-laborer! Nonsense, Benardi! I thought you more sensible."

"I love Fraulein von Hegebach," he replied, looking her full in the face.

"Yes, you plunged in head over ears! I saw it coming, alas!"

"And my love is returned."

"Is that so?" The old lady tossed back her cap-strings indignantly. "What does such a child know of love? Do not tell me that, Bernardi! At that age one has no opinion, and if one has—"

"And if one has, madame," he repeated, "if one has—"

"Well, it will be forgotten, Bernardi! Come," she continued, "do not be nonsensical! I can believe that you fell in love with the child, for she is pretty—but it will not kill you! Seriously, I must beg of you, dear Lieutenant Bernardi, to consider this conversation final. Such a marriage would be an impossibility; neither your parents nor Elsie's father, neither my son nor I would be pleased with it. I shall make no speeches with regard to the great honor and so forth—you know I esteem you as a gentleman, Bernardi; do not make the child's life miserable. I mean well for you and for her."

"I have no promise to break with Fraulein von

Hegebach; far be it from me to wish to cause her unhappiness. Accept my thanks, gracious madame."

He bowed ceremoniously, and was about to leave the room, when Frau von Ratenow turned suddenly and exclaimed: "Stay, Bernardi; I can not let you go, until you have promised me not to approach the child again!"

"I shall leave here as soon as possible, madame!"

"Thank you, dear Bernardi!"

When the door had closed behind him, she remained in the same spot a moment with bowed head, then she passed her hand over her brow as if to exorcise unpleasant thoughts. On entering the card-room later she said: "I am again at your disposal, my friends."

Lieutenant Bernardi danced one more set that evening. He was very gay, the young ladies thought; the men declared he had drunk more champagne than was good for him.

During the dance he picked up and put in his pocket a pink bow which fell at his feet as Elsie passed him; once more he clasped her trembling hand tightly in his and then withdrew with a most courtly bow, without again glancing into her tearful, yearning eyes.

When in the street, he thrust his arm through that of Lieutenant Rost.

"For heaven's sake, do not let us go home yet!" he said in a loud voice, and they turned their steps toward the cafe usually frequented by their "set."

"Well, Dolling," asked Lieutenant von Rost, pointing to Bernardi, who was talking loudly with an older officer as if to silence an inner voice, "what has happened?"

"It is the crisis," replied his companion; "he will get through it!"

VIII.

"Ah, aunt, do not go to sleep yet," implored Elsie. She had donned her dressing-gown and seated herself upon the edge of the old lady's bed.

"My darling, open your heart to me," said her eccentric aunt.

"I love him so dearly!" whispered the rosy lips. Then Elsie spoke no more, but the two women mutely clasped one another's hands.

The day following a ball is the same in every household: the ladies look tired, the men have headaches, the rooms are not yet in order, the servants are sleepy; the best thing about the day is the breakfast.

It was almost twelve o'clock when all gathered in the castle dining-room to partake of that meal. Frau von Ratenow uttered severe criticisms; she was evidently not in the best of humors; Frieda yawned a great deal, and Aunt Lott, reveling in pleasant remembrances, described every gown of the preceding evening, minutely. "Where is Elsie?" at length asked Moritz, who up to that time had eaten and drunk in silence.

"She will be here soon, Moritz," assured Aunt Lott;" she wanted to dress first in order that she might go to her father directly after breakfast, for he is not very well."

"That I can believe," said old Frau von Ratenow. "Did not the child look charming, cousin?" asked Aunt Lott.

"Oh, yes!" was the cold rejoinder. "When is she to begin teaching the children?"

"Not yet," replied Moritz calmly. "I propose waiting until after Easter. And I intended making you a proposition, Aunt Lott. Will you alter your plans this year and go now for your vacation, taking Elsie with you?"

Aunt Lott's kindly old face suddenly grew deathly pale. "Go away from here now?" she stammered, "when Elsie is—I beg of you, Moritz—"

Frau von Ratenow interrupted: "I should be very much annoyed had you encouraged that which we are trying our best to put an end to."

The old maid's face grew still paler.

"I have done nothing, Ratenow," said she gravely and firmly; "no one can encourage that; it is sent by God."

"Well, well," said Aunt Ratenow, "do not get excited. She will be sensible!"

"How many lives have been wrecked by that word!" murmured Aunt Lott.

Frieda, who was very highly amused, received a sharp rebuke from her stern mother-in-law; as she was about to reply, the portieres separated and Elsie entered. Her brown eyes sparkled, her rosy cheeks glowed. Her 'Good morning' sounded so fresh and bright, it seemed as if a merry sunbeam had come into the room.

"Is your father ill?" Aunt Ratenow asked pleasantly.

"Unfortunately he is, dear aunt; I am going to town at once after breakfast."

"It is thawing," warned Moritz, "put on stout shoes."

"When you return, Elsie, come to my room," added Frau von Ratenow.

"Lieutenant Bernardi's compliments."

The servant advanced toward Moritz and handed him a note. Aunt Lott's hand was suddenly grasped by a tiny, trembling one. Moritz read the note, then reread it, and said without raising his eyes: "Lieutenant Bernardi sends his compliments to all, and is very sorry that he cannot come in person, but his time is limited. He leaves this evening at six o'clock for D—, where he takes the place of a sick comrade. He requests me to give the bearer his violin as well as his music; he hopes the ladies are well and that we will think of him kindly. Get the violin out of the drawing-room!"

ordered Moritz. Then he took a card from his pocket-book, wrote a few words upon it with his lead-pencil, inclosed it in an envelope and gave it to the servant. "Our compliments to Lieutenant Bernardi!"

Two brown eyes stared fixedly at the small violin-case as it disappeared behind the portieres. It was so still in the room that a pin might have been heard fall. They say during such a silence that an angel is passing through the room; that time it was the angel of death which nipped a scarcely open bud that had begun to spring up in a youthful heart. Moritz felt as if he *must* speak; he forced himself to glance at the pallid young face opposite him.

"Well, Elsie, shall we go to town? Shall we select the children's school-books?" Impulsively he offered her his hand across the table.

Frau von Ratenow rose, and Elsie left the room, as she said mechanically, "to fetch her wraps."

"Poor child!" lamented Aunt Lott. "She loves him; they love one another."

"Bernardi is a pleasing man," said Frau von Ratenow. "Do not cry, Lott," she added, "I knew long ago that it was coming, but an old woman like me has no sense—and now it has gone as far as this!"

"Good morning!" cried Frieda, rising; "I am

going to dress! It is a pity that Bernardi is going away; we shall have no more musical evenings!" She disappeared in the adjoining room.

"Moritz," said Frau von Ratenow, "in jeweler Thomas' show-window is a small, enamel bracelet. A few days ago Elsie admired it; buy it, lay out the money for me; I will give it back to you afterward. Good morning."

"Pray, Aunt Lott, go upstairs and look after Elsie," besought Moritz hastily.

"Is all over then?" asked the little woman tearfully. Then she slowly ascended the stairs.

Elsie sat at the window, looking into the garden; the sky was overcast and a fine mist was falling.

Aunt Lott busied herself about the stove; the girl must not see that she had been weeping; she took the duster and brushed it over the highly-polished surface of the furniture, upon which not a grain of dust lay: she wanted to speak, but she did not know what to say. The door of Elsie's bedroom was ajar; in her agitation the old lady pushed it open and entered the chamber. There stood the dainty bed with its spotless hangings, a small mother-of-pearl crucifix hung at its head; in a corner by the stove, stood the playthings of her childhood's days and upon the dressing-table, placed carefully in fresh water, stood the half-faded bouquet of violets. The clock ticked in the adjoin-

ing room, but not another sound was to be heard. In the course of a few moments, a door opened, and Moritz's voice said gently as if addressing a child: "Elsie! Elsie! how you look. What ails you?"

"Me? Nothing at all, Moritz."

"You are our dear, sensible girl, Elsie."

She sprang from her chair. "Do not say a word. Be quiet, uncle Moritz," she cried, and passing Aunt Lott, who had just re-entered the room both hands extended toward her pets, she rushed into her chamber and closed the door.

He turned to the window saying: "I am so sorry, Aunt Lott! There she goes," he added, after quite a pause. "She has on her hat and cloak; I should not have let her go alone. Where can she be going, Aunt Lott; she has turned to the left?"

"She is going to the cemetery, Moritz. It is a short cut."

The cemetery was indeed her destination. She scarcely knew what she was about at the time. The snow was melting and walking was difficult; she was so weary, so weary!

Not far from the gate, she met Annie Cramm, who had her skates over her arm and seemed to be in a great hurry.

"Good morning, Elsie; how are you?" she asked, casting a searching glance at the girl.

"Very well, thank you, Annie," she replied.

"Are you going to the cemetery? Heavens! what a gloomy idea so early in the morning and after such an enjoyable ball."

Elsie merely nodded.

"I will walk to the gate with you, Elsie, if you like. You know, of course, that you have become a very famous personage since last night," she said as they walked along. "A while ago, papa told us, only think, a great piece of news. I could have died laughing—that Bernardi had changed places with Lieutenant P. because he had been rejected by your aunt or by you. I said at once: "What nonsense—Bernardi! you know, Elsie, as well as I, that he cannot marry a poor girl."

So disconsolately and mournfully did Elsie's brown eyes gaze at the speaker that she paused in confusion and shifted her skates from her left to her right hand.

"Well, good-bye, Elsie!" said she at length. "Perhaps I will come over this afternoon. My love to Frau von Ratenow!"

Elsie entered the cemetery, and advanced to her mother's grave; it was so cold and still; it was only a grave, and what lay beneath it was lifeless. Not a soul was there, only a little robin-red-breast hopped about and stared at her with his round, curious eyes.

"Why did I live? why did they not lay me beside her at once?" she asked herself.

"You will take cold here, miss," said the old grave-digger who with his hands in his pockets sauntered slowly up to her. "There is nothing to be seen now, miss. In the spring it will be prettier; then the crocuses which you planted will spring up."

Elsie left the cemetery and turned toward town. Her father was there and he was ill. She had entirely forgotten that, during the past few hours.

On the street she met Lieutenant von Rost; when he saw her, he started, she looked so pale and bowed so absently. He stood still and gazed after the slender, girlish form, then he proceeded on his way whistling softly; he always whistled when affected.

"I am glad you have come, Elsie! Ah, your father, your father!" whispered Siethmann in the hall. "There has been no getting along with him since yesterday when the messenger brought that document, and a short while ago the gentleman from Bennewitz sent word he would be here, and now master is furious."

Elsie entered the old man's room. He was seated at the window in an arm-chair, his pipe lay upon the table and in his hand was a letter.

"At last you have come, Elsie! I might die and decompose here for all anyone cares, and it is all

on your account that I am worried with this accursed business."

She made no reply to that unjust reproach.

"I will remain with you, papa, if you like," said she after a pause.

"No! I do not want you to! You know it cannot be! But I must have a talk with you; you must know that there is no more justice."

Elsie did not speak; her head ached and she was indifferent as to what might happen.

"But the deuce may take me if I let the matter rest. I will not give up if I have to take the case to the Supreme Court! And what do you think?" he continued, striking the table with his fist, "that fellow who has not a jot more right than I have, once more offers me alms and sends me word that he will be here to-day himself. Did you think such a thing possible? Let him come, let Siethmann admit him. I am just in the right mood."

Ah, was not the world desolate and comfortless? The world in which everything revolved around possessions? The world in which even the noblest and purest feelings of the human heart must give place to the most sordid interests. The girl fairly loathed wealth and the power of money! Her faith, her love, her ideals lay trampled in the dust; and was she to live thus?

She pressed both hands to her temples when the old man recommenced to rail.

"Papa, don't!" she implored. "It is a matter of indifference to me. I need nothing."

A pause ensued, during which footsteps were heard without, the house door was opened and someone mounted the stairs. Elsie left the room.

"Remain below, Herr von Hegebach," she said softly, leaning over the balusters."

"Why? I must see my cousin."

"Papa is so excited," she replied.

"You look pale, too; would it annoy you if I—"

"Papa is ill, I think," interrupted Elsie.

"Can I have a word with you?"

"With me? Oh, yes—but—"

"Where?" he asked.

"Indeed, I do not know." Siethmann came out into the hall and opened a door.

"It is in order, Elsie, and not too cold."

It was a small room which they entered. In the background was the old woman's store of apples, a chest decorated with bright-colored flowers, a clothes-press, two spinning-wheels and a reel—the whole pervaded by the odor of the fruit. The last rays of the dying day entered the window and fell upon Hegebach's handsome face.

"I have come to reason with your father again; he is exciting himself and incurring expense needlessly. You may rest assured that a new trial will not be any more successful; I am very sorry—"

"I have no influence over papa, Herr von Hegebach," replied Elsie.

"That is unfortunate! But perhaps you will tell him that I am still ready to adhere to my former promise."

"Papa will take no money as a gift," she answered coldly.

"Why do you take that up so quickly?" he asked likewise, in a distant tone. "I only offer him the interest on principal which I cannot draw out of the estate."

"I know nothing about it, sir."

"You should, notwithstanding, present my plan to your father in his interest and your own, dear cousin."

"In papa's interest? He wants nothing for himself. And I am much obliged."

"That is the way all girls of your age talk who do not know what it is—"

"To have no money? To be poor?" interrupted the young girl, all the bitterness of her soul rushing to her quivering lips. "I know it, Herr von Hegebach. One learns that very early in life! If God were just, he would create no poor girls, or he would at least send them into the world without any feelings or any hearts."

He involuntarily drew back and glanced at the small, painfully-compressed lips which had uttered

those words. Why so much bitterness? He said at length: "Other girls of your age weep at the most when a disappointment comes to them."

"I have no cause to weep," she returned briefly.

"I do not like to go away, Elsie von Hegebach," he began after a pause; "it seems to me as if I was doing wrong to leave you here in such a bitter mood. At least, promise me to consider once more what I proposed. It is no alms; it is a right which is your due."

"I do not think that papa—"

"But you!"

"I? Oh, I have passed examination for governess." It was the same old, bitter tone. It sounded almost mocking.

"You are as obstinate as your father!" said he seizing his hat. "To whom can I turn who has some power over you?"

"I fear you would seek in vain for such a person, Herr von Hegebach."

"Good-bye." She bent her head slightly and he withdrew. When the girl was alone, she leaned her forehead against the white-washed wall; a moan resounded through the room and the slender form was shaken as if by a storm.

"Who was here?" asked the old man peevishly, when she entered the room.

"Herr von Hegebach, papa."

"And you did not let him come to me?"

"I told him you were not very well; he only wanted to offer you the income again."

"The devil take him," stormed the old man. "It is the surest proof that he is in the wrong."

"Shall I remain with you, papa? Would you like some more tea?" she asked.

"No, I am going to bed; I do not feel just right."

"Let me stay here." She drew very near to him in the darkness and put her hands on his shoulders.

"What would you do here, Elsie?"

Her voice sounded very gentle as she said: "I think sometimes that I should be with you, papa."

"Yes, yes! But then I should not be a beggar, child! See here, Elsie," he added, "Hegebach has no issue and if everything were as it should be you would have all that money some day. But as you are a girl, you cannot inherit it, for so it says in the will: Daughters are debarred from the inheritance."

Suddenly Elsie kneeled beside him and laid her head upon his hand. "Yes," he continued, "it vexes me daily that you are not a boy, not for my sake, but for yours. Your mother was terrified when they told her you were a girl; we thought you *must* be a boy. Her last words were: 'Ah, a girl! A poor girl!' Well, it is so, however, and you must manage to get along. It is true I have

never done anything to endear myself to you; all the others — Ratenow and Moritz — have done more for you — but one cannot choose one's own father, Elsie."

"No, papa, nor can I help it that I am a poor girl," said she innocently, and two tears fell upon the old man's hand.

"Well, do not cry, child, do not cry. You must go now, it is almost dark."

She rose and fetched her hat and cloak.

"Sleep well, papa; if I have time, I will come soon again. I am going to begin to teach to-morrow, papa."

Again she passed through the dark, muddy streets; at any other time she would have been timid, but that day she did not give it a thought. The wind had risen and whistled through the long alley and the rain beat upon her cheeks and eyes. She walked along as leisurely as if it were a May evening. Suddenly a carriage turned out of the castle gate and drove rapidly past her: it was Hegebach's vehicle. He had been to call upon Aunt Ratenow — perhaps, to find an ally in her.

"Could I only die, I should be happy," she thought.

She must enter the house; she would have preferred to run away as far as her feet would carry her.

"Miss, will you please go to old Frau von Ratenow at once?" said the servant to her in the hall.

She laid aside her hat and cloak and went into the room. Frau von Ratenow was sitting upon the sofa; a bottle with two glasses stood upon the table, and the odor of a fine Havana still lingered in the air.

"How is your father?" asked the old lady, motioning the girl to be seated.

"Thanks, he is tolerably well, aunt."

"You look pale; that comes from dancing, Elsie."

"Yes, aunt."

"See, there comes our fair little mouse," said the old lady, smiling at the pretty child, who with an air of importance crossed the room and approached Elsie.

"From grandmamma, aunt," she whispered, laying a small heavy object in Elsie's lap, and then hastily returning to her corner.

It was a handsome black enamel bracelet which Elsie held in her hand.

"You are so kind, dear aunt," said she, looking at Frau von Ratenow with her lovely brown eyes, no longer those of a child, and kissing the extended hand. "I will wear it for your sake."

"I was going to ask you to, Elsie. And now, you may go. Herr von Hegebach left his compliments for you."

Arrived in her room, Elsie hastily laid the circlet down. She wanted no pity, she could not bear it, she said. As if a trifling ornament could soothe her aching heart or still her passionate yearning.

She would gladly have remained in her own room, but the family would think she was weeping for her lover, and she would not shed one tear. But she did not keep her resolution.

A sweet perfume hovered around her; there stood the violets, and it seemed as if they said in his voice: "Happiness! This moment is happiness to me."

She suddenly burst into tears; the next moment the door opened and Aunt Lott clasped the trembling girl in her arms.

Aunt Lott knew all; *she* might see that her heart was breaking.

IX.

Two weeks had flown when one morning Aunt Lott descended the stairs hastily, and asked for Moritz.

"He is with mistress," said the servant; the old lady passed through the blue drawing room and stopping at the boudoir door she asked: "Am I disturbing you, children?"

"Come in, Aunt Lott," cried Moritz.

Frieda sat at her writing desk.

"One moment, aunt," said she, rereading a letter written upon a dainty, crested sheet of paper. The contents ran as follows

"My Dearest Lili — Only a few words in haste that you may be *au fait* with my ball dress for Berlin, as we shall no doubt be much together. I have ordered at Gerson's a white satin costume trimmed with silver embroidery; the bodice of *drap d' argent*, and I shall wear my diamonds with it instead of flowers. I think it will look very *distingue*.

"Mamma and Moritz insist that Elsie, who at present is pining, (on account of Lieutenant Ber-

nardi), go with us. I have had enough of that 'Elizabeth-worship' and shall tell Moritz what I think of it.

"I implore you, Lili, never to take into your house a young girl who has so-called equal rights with the family; it is more than unpleasant, especially when the master of the house feels in duty bound to play the role at once of father and knight, as Moritz does. My patience will not last much longer. Remember me to our parents. *Auf Wiedersehen.*

"Your sister, FRIEDA."

"N. B. Hegebach comes remarkably often now; I do not trust my mother-in-law on that point — she says it is on account of Elsie's father. There is an old proverb, which, however, I will not repeat here. F."

"Now, aunt, what is it?" she asked, after she had addressed and sealed the envelope. She stepped to a magnificent piece of furniture, opened her drawers and began to look over her finery.

She wore a light blue dressing gown and upon her luxuriant dark tresses was perched a lace rosette with a blue ribbon.

"Oh, heavens!" began Aunt Lott, turning to Moritz, who sat motionless at the fire-place in a gray pilot-coat and high boots, just as he had come in from the fields, "Oh, heavens, Moritz, my heart

will break for Elsie; she says nothing, she does not murmur, but she does not sleep; she has no appetite and she is growing so thin; will you not send the doctor up when he comes? I am afraid she will make herself ill about that Bernardi."

"Is that farce not ended yet?" asked Frieda. "Elsie seems to be very content. That she is somewhat timid yet is only natural, for she was the talk of the town for a week."

"Yes, she has wonderful self-control, Frieda," said the old lady gravely, shaking her head, "but—"

"Well, you all do everything in order to console her," continued Frieda angrily; "no one asks if anything suits me, it is always Elsie. It is so with mamma, the children and Moritz; I cannot even speak as I will and how I will, and very soon at meals I shall not even utter a word."

Aunt Lott glanced in terror at Moritz who leaned back in his chair so indifferently.

"You see, aunt, Frieda knows that it is becoming for her to pout a little. But, child, you must not take that disagreeable mood with you to Berlin, for—"

"If you insist that Elsie is to go with us, I shall remain at home with my disagreeable mood," she interrupted.

"You must settle that with mamma," he replied calmly; "she wanted Elsie to accompany us."

"I cannot go then, on account of the children," persisted his wife. "I do not see what I have a governess for, if I cannot leave home occasionally with comfort."

"Up to this time, nurse has always been sufficient. But, please yourself, Frieda; I have never quarreled with you when it pleased you to be contrary, you know. This is the last day that Elsie will fill the position of governess; I will take steps at once to obtain another."

Frieda did not reply, but slowly closed one drawer after the other.

"I only ask one favor, Frieda," he began once more: "do not let Elsie suspect why this arrangement was made. The rest will be arranged."

He rose, took his cap and riding-whip from the chair and strode out of the room. His wife buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Oh dear! Aunt Lott, I am so very miserable."

"For God's sake, Frieda, what ails you?"

"He loves me no longer," sobbed the pretty woman sinking into the nearest chair; "I know it only too well, he loves me no longer!"

"Lord, you are not jeal—" The word did not pass her lips.

"And now he is going to mamma who always treats me like an unreasonable child."

She suddenly started up, the blue curtains were

thrust aside, and Frau von Ratenow crossed the threshold.

"Well, Frieda, Moritz tells me that you are not very well," she began, seating herself beside her weeping daughter-in-law. Frieda stammered something about a headache.

"Of course!" The old lady took her hand. "It is too much for you to hear the children's noise all day. I know that nerves are fashionable. I will make you a proposition: Send the girls to school, then the house will be delightfully quiet, my daughter, and you need not worry about a governess any more."

Frieda rose quickly from her reclining posture, but she did not reply.

"Elsie von Hegebach shall be my companion, dear child," said Frau von Ratenow, raising her voice, "and as such, I shall protect her against all indignity, Frieda."

Frieda turned pale.

"I did not mean it that way," said she, tearfully.

"Where is Elsie?" asked her mother-in-law.

"In the nursery; she is teaching the children to cipher," was the answer given in a low voice.

"I hope to see you this evening at tea," continued Frau von Ratenow. "Aunt Lott, pray be punctual. Herr von Hegebach is coming."

"The third time in two weeks," said Frieda,

rising. "Formerly he never came, or rather he came very seldom."

"That is so! For years he had a delicate wife, and lately he has been in deep mourning. Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you this evening?" she asked once more.

"I am very sorry, mamma, but we are invited to tea at Frau von *Z*—'s."

"Elsie too?"

"She was invited, but she declined."

The old lady nodded pleasantly to her daughter-in-law, saying: "Adieu, my sweet child; send the little ones to me awhile if you like."

"You see, aunt, that is the way mamma always is!" complained Frieda. "Anyone would say that I was right. If Elsie once undertook to teach the chlidren, she should do it thoroughly. I am the last one to be exacting. If I lost patience it would be no wonder. I think the girls are learning when Moritz comes and says: 'Elsie, we are going to the subscription ball at Berlin. Mother will give you a dress.' How can she be expected to be serious?"

"I do not believe Elsie wanted to accept the position at first," thus the anxious old lady defended her protege.

But she was forced to listen to more lamentations. Frieda was so terribly injured in all her rights.

She even kept her promise and at the table did not utter a word!

All at once the storm, which had been threatening so long, gathered on Moritz's sky! A sultry, oppressive atmosphere pervaded the house, notwithstanding the clear, frosty air without. Elsie did not notice it; she had one of the children on each side of her and she was kept busy answering their questions.

Yes, indeed, the girl looked miserable and she was very quiet: that was caused by the constant struggle of a proud, wounded heart, with the mute question: Why should it have been I? That was caused by sleepless nights and the yearning for the golden days which were past! She seemed to herself like a pariah among the others: comfortless, rejected, despised—all because she was poor! She could not even weep. There was still much which made life worth living. Hundreds and hundreds took what Fate decreed them, and were contented without happiness! But they had all passed along a road of nettles and thorns in order to get so far; a youthful, bruised heart, thirsting for love, could not, however, cradle itself in the sleep of oblivion—that required long years of experience!

In the evening, old Frau von Ratenow's room was the coziest in the house; a fire glowed in the stove, the heavy curtains were drawn at the win-

dows, shutting out every draught, and falling in folds upon the thick, soft carpet, and the lamp-light played on the snow-white, damask table-cloth covered with silver and crystal.

Aunt Lott and the hostess sat upon the sofa, the latter with her knitting in her hand. Elsie, who was bending over a piece of fine embroidery, wore a dark house-dress and an embroidered apron. The owner of Bennewitz was expected. The hours spent in his company were almost repulsive to Elsie. Since her father had addressed his first kind words to her, her childish sympathy was all his. She knew that he was not treating his cousin justly, but he had said he was doing it for her sake, and that exalted his caprices, his obstinacy, in the girl's eyes.

After that one outburst he remained as unapproachable as ever; but she had obtained one glimpse of the bitterness of his soul and no word was too harsh, no mood too gloomy; the dross of sorrow and loneliness lay over the gold in the man's heart; he was her father, the only person upon whom she had a claim, a sacred claim. Meetings with the owner of Bennewitz were, therefore, painful to her; it was true that during his visits to the castle, he had never up to that time mentioned her father, but, nevertheless—she knew what he thought of him and what Aunt Ratenow thought of him, and it grieved her deeply.

Bernardi's name never passed the old lady's lips; that matter was settled once for all—the least said about it, the better!

"Elsie," said Frau von Ratenow, pushing back her spectacles and putting down the newspaper, "you may read that aloud to me; my eyes are daily growing worse. I do not know, Lott, how you have retained your sight so well with your everlasting reading. It is a great comfort to me that Moritz acceded to my request and relieved you, Elsie, of the charge of the children. I am really not able to read the morning paper nor to write a letter."

Elsie took up the newspaper and said:

"If I only had the comfort of knowing, dear aunt, that Moritz and Frieda were not dissatisfied with my efficiency."

"Ah, people always talk that way when they want compliments paid them," returned the old lady. "No, no, I asked Moritz to do it. What terrible things are liable to happen if one cannot see well! There, however, comes Hegebach," she cried.

A carriage rattled through the court and drew up at the door; steps were heard in the hall and Frau von Ratenow rose with a certain solemnity.

"Good evening, my dear Hegebach," she exclaimed, shaking hands with him cordially. "I am glad that you are going to help us three solitary women while away a few hours."

He gallantly kissed her extended hand, and bowed to Aunt Lott and Elsie. The latter he handed a white, paper parcel.

"The only one that was in blossom in the conservatory," said he.

It was a fine Marechal Neil.

"Thank you very much, Herr von Hegebach!" She puts the rose in a vase, and busied herself about the tea-table.

"Nothing new, dear Hegebach?" asked Frau von Ratenow. Then the conversational ball was set rolling. They both were familiar with the entire surrounding country and its inhabitants; from those of that day, they turned to those of olden days.

"Pardon me, Hegebach, I am ten years older than you—just the same age as your cousin; I know that positively."

"You are mistaken, madame," said Hegebach calmly, "you are at the most eight years older than I; when I married I was thirty-six, and eighteen years have passed since then."

"Indeed! How time flies!"

"Yes, yes, Elsie will be nineteen in the spring!" said Aunt Lott.

"Well, there are older folks than we are, Hegebach! You are still a young man," said Frau von Ratenow.

Aunt Lott glanced at him; he was handsome

and dignified—but was he still young? It was a long time since she had been young, and she was not many years his senior.

Elsie sat by silently, her thoughts wandered. What cared she for those stories of long ago? They lay so far back in the past. A nervous unrest possessed her; she would have liked to have sought her own little room, to have seated herself at the window, to have meditated and dreamed—it was so difficult not to yield to sad, longing thoughts.

"How is your father?" Hegebach asked Elsie.

"Thank you, he is tolerably well," she replied.

"Is he in a gentler mood?" He uttered those words more softly, and his dark eyes gazed into hers with an imploring expression.

She blushed.

"Papa does not change his opinion over night," said she abruptly.

Frau von Ratenow's face darkened.

"Elsie," said she, "will you please see that tea is served?"

The young girl rose, crossed the soft carpet noiselessly, and disappeared in the adjoining room.

Herr von Hegebach's eyes followed her; he slowly stroked his dark beard. Frau von Ratenow changed the subject; she evidently wished to blot out the remembrance of that rude reply.

When Elsie reappeared, conversation was again flowing freely.

Herr von Hegebach was excellent company; he had traveled extensively and he was acquainted with a host of people of note. He was a man who knew life, who knew it from its best side. And over there in that gloomy house sat a miserable old man, who had not once had money sufficient to pay his fare to a resort at which he might have obtained relief from his sufferings. The sum that his cousin had spent at Cairo for one costly dagger would have sufficed for a several weeks' stay at Toplitz.

Bitter, disagreeable thoughts filled Elsie's brain. Everything in which, up to that time, she had believed—love, faith, honor, were all as nothing. The only thing which engendered happiness and strength was wealth.

"To a speedy future friendship, cousin," Hegebach raised his glass. Elsie took up hers.

"Look me in the face," said he gravely. Again the blood rushed to her cheeks; she was vexed with herself, but those eyes were so peculiar.

"Remain, Elsie," said Frau von Ratenow when at eleven o'clock, Hegebach drove away, taking with him the promise that the ladies would soon visit him at Bennewitz.

Elsie returned and sat down. Aunt Lott had excused herself on the stroke of ten.

Frau von Ratenow was vexed, yet she did not know what to say to Elsie.

"You have a remarkable way of treating Hegebach, dear child," said she at length; "it is absurd to bear him a grudge on account of your father's nonsensical notions. You should at least be neutral."

"I know that Herr von Hegebach is right, aunt," replied Elsie, looking full in the old lady's face. "I bear him no malice—that would be ridiculous."

"That is well. But why are you so—abrupt with him?"

"I beg your pardon, aunt," she stammered.

Frau von Ratenow rose and took her hands.

"I do not know if you are different from other girls—but good night, Elsie."

As if hunted, the girl flew upstairs to her room. No, it was not possible that aunt had intended to say that which at that moment occurred to her. But what *had* she meant? She laughed almost contemptuously. She paused at the mirror and gazed at her pale face. Certainly it was absurd; only an excited fancy could suggest such folly. No, aunt had not meant anything; it was simply her way of speaking.

"Aunt Lott!" cried she softly. She seemed to fear her own thoughts and entered the old lady's room.

"What is it, my pet?" asked the latter drowsily.

"I am afraid, auntie."

Aunt Lott, fully aroused, sat up in bed.

"I was reminded so vividly of your mother this evening, child," she began; "we always sat just that way in Cousin Ratenow's sitting-room when your father was courting her. You look so much like her, Elsie, and Hegebach reminds me of your father somewhat; his voice and gestures are the same."

The girl stood there motionlessly; inexplicable anguish contracted her throat.

"That was twenty years ago and it seems only yesterday to me, Elsie," continued the old lady in her tearful tones, "only Ratenow has grown much stouter and my hair is gray. How vividly the past recurs to us sometimes! Lieschen, your mother, often came to my bedside thus, and once, I remember, she said to me: 'Oh, Lott, Lott! I am afraid!'"

"Aunt, please, I am afraid!" Elsie's slender, girlish form pressed closer to the bedside and trembled nervously.

"You are not well, Elsie!"

"No, I think I am going to be ill, aunt!"

"Poor child! That is caused by grief."

"I am not grieving, aunt."

"I know, child, you fancy you are not; but one can grieve unconsciously. When the doctor comes to-morrow he must give you something to make you sleep. I have told Moritz. Do you think I

do not know when you enter my room at night? I hear every leaf rustle. Good night, darling, go to sleep. Once I could stay up late, but now—"

X.

Weeks had glided by and spring had come. The trees budded, the lawn at the castle was strewn with violets, and in the cemetery upon the grave which Elsie cared for, crocuses bloomed. She had, too, twined a wreath about the cross which bore the name of the deceased: it was the anniversary of her mother's death and it was likewise her birthday. She sat for a long while upon the stone inclosure of the grave, and her hands mechanically arranged the leaves of the wreath while her eyes gazed over cross and stone into space.

Her life of late had been one ceaseless, silent struggle with herself, with others; she had no one in whom she could confide. All were in arms against her, even Moritz who constantly avoided her.

One day Aunt Lott left suddenly. She came upstairs from Cousin Ratenow's room with tear-swollen eyes and packed her trunk. Her cousin thought it would be more advisable that year if she remained at home in the summer time and took her vacation at once. And what Aunt Ratenow willed was always done.

Frieda was enjoying a visit from her sister, Lili, a petite brunette, not as pretty as Frieda, but with a merry laugh and the knack of winning the entire household.

Frau von Ratenow declared she was a 'modern goose,' and that it was well that she had formed a friendship with Annie Cramm, for they were a good match.

Notwithstanding the numerous diversions which presented themselves, Miss Lili was always present at tea-time at "dear, charming" Frau von Ratenow's table. She was so fond of old ladies and gentlemen, too fond in fact, for she would never be able to fall in love with a young man. She liked men of about fifty the best! How interesting for a young girl to have an elderly husband! It was so amusing to hear her talk, that even Frau von Ratenow had to smile.

"But he must have a great deal of money, Lili, eh?"

"Of course, dear, sweet auntie, either he must have loads of money, or he must at least be a general."

Hegebach came frequently, and Aunt Ratenow was more delighted with him than ever. Frieda had always a sweet smile for him and Lili glanced coquettishly at him from beneath her long, dark lashes. When his elegantly appointed carriage

drew up at the door, Aunt Ratenow hastened to meet him in the hall, and Frieda with Lili stood upon the staircase. Herr von Hegebach was always confused and embarrassed, for he was uncertain whether to enter the younger lady's cozy boudoir or Aunt Ratenow's sitting-room.

Elsie, to all appearances, stood without the circle, and yet she knew that she was being forced more and more toward the center. Constantly she sought to regain every inch of ground wrested from her forcibly. Unconsciously her eyes rested upon her aunt's stern features as if imploring mercy; constantly her youthful heart shrank, like that of a frightened child, from the glances of two dark eyes, and gradually she lost foot after foot of her ground.

That morning, the morning of her birthday, a magnificent bouquet stood upon her table in Aunt Ratenow's room, and the visiting-card attached to it announced the donor.

There was a letter too from Aunt Lott, kind, old Aunt Lott! Moritz had pressed her hand and had given her a pretty portfolio of Russia leather. The children had kissed her affectionately. Lili and Frieda came in too, the latter with all sorts of bows and "tackle," as Aunt Ratenow called it; one pale blue knot the old lady returned to her, remarking that that had surely chanced among the

collection by accident, for a needle was sticking in it.

Elsie was so dispirited that it was a matter of indifference to her if Frieda offered her worn finery; she was a poor girl, why should she not wear cast-off ribbons? She had no money for such luxuries, and Frieda did not mean to wound her. Ah, if that had been all!

Aunt Ratenow had that morning told her about her birthday and how sad it all was, how at that time her father had been so gloomy, and how she had told him his daughter would prove a blessing to him yet, a great blessing, "and that depends upon you, Elsie," she had added.

The young girl in the quiet cemetery rose suddenly. That same horrible, icy feeling crept over her. Hastily she walked along; she did not notice how bright the sunshine was, that spring had come, that the trees and grass were green, and that the birds were twittering. Her cheeks burned feverishly as she entered her father's room. She would turn to him; he hated the owner of Bennewitz; he would permit her to fly to him if—

The old man had both windows open; the paper lay before him upon the table, and beside his pipe lay a half-empty wine-glass.

"Papa, are you not well?" asked Elsie.

"Oh, yes, child. Only my breathing and the cough—but now they are much better; you may

close the windows, I can not bear any noise to-day." He extended his hand toward her, and for a moment he tightly clasped her delicate hand in his. "Draw the curtains too, the sun is so hot, Elsie, and then—perhaps it will give you pleasure—that little box over there your mother always kept on her work-table and in it she kept all the jackets and caps which she made for you. I have always treasured it up, Elsie—take it with you. It was so home-like when she sat before it; it was the happiest time of my life—on such a day it all rushes back upon me. Once she went out, about Christmas-time, and when she returned she said, as she sat at her sewing-table, her brown eyes sparkling with happiness: "Hegebach, I saw such a beautiful rocking-horse at Lehmann's—" Ah, Elsie, if I could have bought you a rocking-horse, things would have been very different!"

The girl bowed her head. Still the old refrain.

"Child," he said as he pushed toward her the mahogany box, with its simple silver plate upon which were engraved her dead mother's initials, "I have withdrawn my suit against Hegebach."

"Papa!" That single word sounded like a cry of terror.

"Yes, child, why not? You often told me I had no rights. And now he wishes for a reconciliation, Elsie. It is to be a surprise for you, child; they are

going to send the carriage for me that we may dine together at Ratenow's. But I do not know, Elsie, if I can go. I cannot stand excitement, and, you see, my dislike has been so deeply rooted that it is no easy matter. I know that I should do it for your sake, but—"

"Papa, not for my sake, I pray you!" implored Elsie, pale to her very lips. "Who said so?"

"Ratenow, child, and she is right, yes, she is right!"

Elsie sprang from her chair; she made a futile attempt to speak.

"Do not be vexed, Elsie, that I betrayed the secret. I am so happy again. You see, child, it is a terrible feeling for a father to leave a child behind him in the world, without a penny."

"Dear papa!" She bent over him. "I am not a afraid, indeed I am not: you are still alive, you will live a long time, and I can remain with you. I came hither to ask that boon of you, papa."

"Do not try to make me break my word, Elsie. I am so weak, and Siethmann is so cross and noisy, I—" He gasped and clutched at his breast —"Silence those silly fears—it is well that all is as it is—for you, child. You do not know how miserable, cold and cheerless life can be. Your path is strewn with roses!"

She made no reply, for she knew it would avail

her naught. At that moment Siethmann rushed in, in the greatest excitement. Madame from the castle and the gentleman from Bennewitz were mounting the stairs.

The old man's color changed. "Go into the other room, Elsie, you need not see how—" He paused.

She passed through the narrow door into her mother's room and confronted Frau von Ratenow.

"We came here, Elsie, because at home even the walls have ears. Lili is everywhere and into everything, and I did not want her to hear." She seated herself by the window and loosened her bonnet strings. "Heavens, I believe Siethmann has lighted a fire!" she added.

The atmosphere was stifling; so thought too the pale maiden who breathed with difficulty.

From the next room could be heard the owner of Bennewitz's sonorous voice, so conciliating, so kind; the old lady listened and drummed upon the window-pane with an expression upon her face of the greatest satisfaction.

"Elsie," said she, "nineteen years ago you lay in the corner of that sofa and cried most pitifully. Ah, if I could only have seen into the future, I would not have taken you into my arms with so heavy a heart."

"What do you mean, aunt?"

"Ah, my dear girl, the ways of the Lord are truly

wonderful; everything comes right in time! What do I mean? Come, Elsie, you are not stupid. I know that you can answer your question as well as I. And if you do so with your usual good sense, you will say: Thank God that matters have taken this turn; old Aunt Ratenow has always been very kind to me, but it is a different thing to be one's own mistress, and my old father shall have a few days free from care. Is it not so?"

"Aunt, please!" moaned the young girl.

"See here, child; he is so kind, so kind! he is really a charming person! I will confess, Elsie, when I heard—you were still at school—that he had lost his sons, I thought: He will marry again! And then I thought it would be providential if he took a fancy to you, Elsie. So I saw it come about gradually with delight; and—now he is in there, Elsie, proposing to your father for your hand. Come here, child, quite near me! Do you think I did not notice your fancy for the handsome lieutenant? Lieutenants, Elsie, are very nice for girls to dance with—but it is necessary to have more than a pair of bright eyes and two epaulettes, in order to get married! Elsie! How you do look! Elsie! Elsie!"

The girl fell upon her knees and clasping her hands, cried with tearless eyes: "Aunt, aunt, have mercy! I will do anything—but that I cannot!"

"Great heavens!" Frau von Ratenow raised the girl from the floor. "Elsie! pray compose yourself! There is more at stake than a girl's caprice! Beware of 'I cannot,' child! There are serious things in life at which one must not look too closely. Had I not had such a sensible father it would have fared ill with me. Do you think I should have chosen Friedrich Ratenow? No, Elsie. I was head-over-ears in love with a very, very poor fellow. I was bold enough to confess this to my father when Ratenow proposed for me. Lord! child, you should have been there! Before I could say 'Jack Robinson' the poor fellow was discarded and Ratenow's ring on my finger. I never regretted it. What do you expect? It is the same with royal princesses. Come, Elsie, be sensible!" She stroked the fair head which lay upon her bosom.

"Not yet, aunt! Give me time, I beseech you!" implored the trembling girl. "I must be calmer first. You must grant me that boon, you must." She uttered the last words almost passionately.

The old lady saw that she need urge the girl no farther.

"I will tell you, child, take a walk; there is plenty of time before dinner." She fetched Elsie's hat and cloak. "Now, my girl, adieu!"

Elsie left the room hastily: she would at least be in the open air; hope was still in her breast; she

still felt strong enough to defend herself against the entire world. She thought of the quiet village in Thuringen, of the picturesque chapel and of the people who lived there so peacefully; she saw Sister Beate's kindly face very plainly: there was one spot then which the storms of life did not reach. She arrived home before she was aware of it; she was relieved when the servant told her that his mistress and her sister had gone out. She began to ascend the stairs, then she turned suddenly:

"Where is the baron?" she asked.

"In his room, miss."

She descended the stairs and knocked at a door.

"Come in."

"Moritz, it is I. May I come in?"

"Why, Elsie—of course."

"I wanted to ask you something, Moritz."

"Very well, Elsie. Come, let us go into the garden."

She looked at him in surprise, he acted so strangely, was so confused.

"As you like, Moritz."

They passed into the garden. It smelt of violets and the birds warbled sweetly. That old castle garden was a charming spot.

"Moritz," began Elsie, "have I done anything to you?"

"No, my dear child," he replied gently.

"I thought I had; you have been so changed lately."

He glanced at her as she walked beside him with downcast eyes. What had become of the fresh, bright girl?

"Moritz!" It was the old child-like tone. "Must I do what they all want me to? Must I?"

"*Must* you? No, Elsie; but it would perhaps be well if you could."

"I cannot, Moritz."

"Elsie!" He paused and took her hand. "Think no more of Bernardi," said he in his kindly, affectionate manner; "do not wait for him; men of our condition forget such things. You must not fancy that he is grieving as you are, little one; you do not know anything of the world yet."

She raised her mournful eyes to his, and a blush suffused her pale cheeks.

"I do often think of him, Moritz; it comes against my will. But I have had no hope from the very first. I know only too well that there is a deep gulf between us. I only thought if I—but you would not understand me, Moritz! I do not love my cousin the least bit—not in the least—not as one should love who—" She hesitated and the tears slowly coursed down her cheeks.

Of course he understood her, but dared he? What would become of her? He could not even

offer her shelter if she refused Hegebach. His mother would be very angry, and Frieda!—his domestic happiness was at stake! It sounded absurd, but the little woman was jealous, decidedly jealous, and she showed it on every occasion which presented itself.

Elsie in her innocence did not suspect it, nor should she!

"Elsie," said he at length, "do not make life such a burden to yourself. You see, one grows older and more mature daily; one thinks differently, in time, of such things. Elsie, I would consider it again!"

She dried her tears.

"Well, Moritz, do me one favor then, please; ask Aunt Ratenow to require no decisive answer from me to-day. And, Moritz, forgive me for asking you."

She turned toward the house. From the drawing-room issued the strains of a waltz. Lili was playing. Elsie reached her small room and seated herself by the window. She had no one to sympathize with her—she stood alone; all would be vexed with her for refusing an assured future, a life of luxury, the envied position of a wealthy young woman for the reason which, to the worldly, is so ridiculous, and to a pure, womanly heart so sacred!

"But papa! Poor papa!" said a voice within her.

Then a flush of shame mounted to her brow.

"No," said she, half-aloud, "I do not love him; I should be deceiving him."

She knew nothing of the thorny paths of life through which a poor girl must wander, but they could not be so horrible as if she—she rose and shuddered nervously. She seized a book and glanced through it; then she closed it, buried her face in her clasped hands, and wept like a child—a poor, forsaken child.

The hours glided by; twilight crept on apace; the moon cast its silvery light into the young girl's room, and still she sat there in the same position. From the drawing-room came the sounds of music; Miss Lili was playing the piano in order to while away the time. The others remained in Aunt Ratenow's room so long, and the old lady had politely requested Miss Lili not to come over. It had been an insufferably dull day; at dinner Hegebach scarcely uttered a word and stroked his beard continually; before that, she had been bored by the visit to Cramm's where Annie figured as a happy bride, standing as stiff as a wax doll, and beside her, Lieutenant von Rost, who looked as indifferent as if the whole affair were no concern of his. The only one who was really affected was Mrs. Cramm. Lili, when her first surprise was over, had excused herself, of course with the permission

to tell the glad tidings. In the anteroom she asked in true military style: "Annie, when did the bomb burst? Since when have you entertained the idea? No one suspected such a thing."

Annie replied with a blush: "Oh, we have liked one another a long time, but papa would not hear of it."

"How dreadful!"

With difficulty Lili restrained a burst of laughter.

"Ah, Lili, I should have died without him!"

"Would you?" was the mischievous reply. "But I will not detain you any longer! Say, Annie, is his name von Rost?"

"Yes." The answer was given rather snappishly.

"Good-bye, Annie!"

Lili had hastened to tell the great piece of news at the dinner-table, and there found nothing but impassive listeners with the exception of Frieda.

XI.

At the conclusion of the meal, Hegebach took his leave; the sisters approached the window in order to look after his fine equipage, and Lili yawned loudly.

"Brr, Frieda!" said she, "I think I shall go home soon!"

"I do not blame you!"

Lili took up one of Heyse's novels. Moritz had gone to his mother's room and Frieda shortly followed him. Before going she had said: "See here, Lili, something is not right over there again, and I shall inquire into it."

Frieda had been gone a long time, and Lili was lonesome; not even "pale Elsie" came to relieve the monotony. It would certainly be best for her to go home, she thought.

When Frieda entered Frau von Ratenow's room, the old lady sat in her corner by the window as calmly as usual, her knitting in her hand. Moritz was pacing the room with rapid strides; he appeared very much agitated.

"Ah!" cried his pretty little wife, "Moritz is like a caged lion! What has happened?"

"I do not quite agree with mamma, Frieda."

"Well," said his wife, ironically, "that is strange!"

"I maintain," said Frau von Ratenow, "that one must be firm. There are many who rebel against what is for their good, as a sick child does against medicine."

"And I maintain, mother, that it is not the custom in our country to sell women to the highest bidder!" cried Moritz, his honest face suffused with a flush of anger. "I for my part have no respect for a girl who will suffer herself to be given in marriage, simply that she may have someone to support her." He paused before his mother with sparkling eyes.

The old lady's composure did not forsake her. Moritz had always been somewhat of a dreamer. He inherited that from his father. The "boy" did not even know what want meant to an unprotected, poor girl.

"I cannot, of course drag her to the altar, and Hegebach is not the man to beg for a wife," was her reply. "Words, my son, are all very well if one has the necessary means. You yourself know best that theory and practice are very different things. I have talked enough lately on that subject; I will say no more. I meant well. My grandmother used to say: Love? Love is for the most part imagination. I have known a great many

girls who, because they could not have their first lovers were ready to drown themselves, only to find out afterward that their "*seconds*" were the truly loved. Come, Moritz, it is absurd in you: those are opinions which, at the most, a love-sick school-girl or an old maid might utter unchidden."

"It may be," he replied sharply, "that there are many such, but I will not believe it." He stopped in front of Frieda and looked down upon her with glowing eyes. "Frieda, speak in vindication of your sex!"

"I do not know what you mean." The little woman turned from one to the other in perplexity.

"Hegebach proposed for Elsie's hand to-day, and she—"

"For Elsie's hand? Is that so?" cried Frieda with a laugh. Involuntarily Moritz started. What signified that almost hysterical laughter which was neither laughter nor tears?

"Of course you persuaded her not to accept him, Moritz?" she said.

"Not to accept him? No, Frieda; on the contrary I tried to convince her of the necessity of the step, but nevertheless my heart ached for her."

"Of course!" His wife laughed still more. "I can scarcely imagine how it would be at the castle without Elsie von Hegebach."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the old lady.

"Oh, nothing, mamma; Moritz probably understood me."

"I did not, Frieda," said he calmly.

"But I did." Frau von Ratenow rose and stood before her daughter-in-law. "I have had a great deal of patience with you, my child—with your humors and caprices by means of which you have tyrannized over the entire household. I excused you continually because I supposed that you were deeply attached to your husband. That he allowed you to torment him, was his own affair. But if you dare," she raised her voice—"even in your thoughts to ascribe a dishonorable action to him, or if you dare to sully the reputation of the girl who has been reared beneath my roof, Frieda, I shall forget, as sure as there is a heaven above me, that you are my only son's wife, that you are the mother of his children."

"Cease, mother!" said Moritz gently, seizing the old lady's threateningly raised hand. "Frieda does not know what she is saying; she does not mean anything."

The young wife sat in her chair as pale as death; passionate defiance was written upon her features.

"Yes!" she cried springing up, "I do mean something by it; I know what I said. Since Elsie has been in the house he is a different man; he has only eyes and thoughts for her. I know it better than you and the others!"

"Be silent!" commanded the old lady with such calm dignity that the pretty lips were involuntarily silenced. "What did I tell you, Moritz," she turned to her son, "when you wooed your bride? Never grow weary of curbing her that she may not grow over your head! Now you are reaping the harvest of your submission, your trifling; there are women and children to whom kindness is as poison —and this was a love-match! Mine was not, but I respected your father and never dared to insult him! Now, my son, beg her pardon and the modern romance will be ended!"

"You know very well, mother, that I shall not do that," he replied gloomily.

But the old lady did not hear him; she had entered her bedroom and bolted it behind her.

"Frieda," said he sadly, turning toward his wife, "you have made a great mistake. God knows, you could not have wounded me more deeply."

She stood there motionless, her blue eyes filled with tears.

"Frieda, go to your room, calm yourself," said he, "and then let us talk matters over quietly. My God, how could you ever think such a thing!"

He turned pale. She might have seen that she had cut the great, faithful man to the quick, but she did not wish to. She shook off his hand and left the room hastily—she was a deeply injured

woman! "Oh, Lili," she sobbed, falling upon her sister's shoulder, "it is terrible in addition to everything else to have such a mother-in-law. Although Moritz is so old, he is still tied to her apron-strings and never once takes my part when she treats me like a school-girl. But why should he? he loves me no longer!"

The miserable day merged into a miserable evening. Frieda locked herself in her room and would not see Moritz. Lili brought him the message, and she looked at her brother-in-law as timidly as one would look at a criminal of the worst order.

The children cried, and when he tried to quiet them he frightened them with his gloomy looks.

He sought the open air; it was suffocating in the house. He crossed the court, walked along the alley and aimlessly sauntered through the city gates. The streets were still filled with people; children played before the doors, and neighbors chatted one with another in the moonlight.

"Holloa, Ratenow!" cried a voice, and someone patted Moritz on the shoulder. "What are you doing here? If you are looking for company come to the 'Casino.' Rost is celebrating his betrothal."

It was Captain von P. who spoke thus.

Moritz was not in the mood; he begged to be excused on account of his dress, but finally he yielded. The fine dining-room was already filled

when the two men entered; the lucky bridegroom was the most unconcerned of all with the exception perhaps of the owner of Bennewitz, who was smoking his cigar pathetically.

"The deuce," said Moritz, with difficulty forcing himself to appear gay. "You here, Herr von Hegebach? How comes Saul among the prophets?"

"They snared me, as they probably did you, dear Ratenow," he replied, drawing up a chair for Moritz. "I did not care about going home—you know there are times in life when there is no rest in any spot."

Moritz did not reply; he knew what Hegebach meant. He himself had that morning asked him to be patient until the morrow—Elsie was surprised, his proposal was so unexpected, and many such phrases which one usually makes use of in order to gain time.

After the punch came the Sect; Rost was very extravagant; he had a "fine" father-in-law who had promised to help him out of his difficulties before his marriage, and a bottle or two more or less of Sect made no difference.

"Have you sent word to Bernardi, Rost?" asked Assessor Dolling.

"Of course," he replied. "He will, I hope, send his congratulations by telegram, for his letters are unbearable."

"His letters!"

"His letters are better than he is," cried one of the young men. "He does nothing but work or play the violin. When I had leave of absence I tried several times to get him to go out, but he said he cared nothing for the theaters and popular places of amusement."

The majority of the men laughed.

"I did not trouble him again," concluded the officer filling his glass. "We cavalry men never weary of diversion!"

"I really believe that he is going to sell out," said another. "I found it out accidentally: he asked my uncle, who is a kind of musical crank, if he thought that he had talent enough to become a virtuoso, an artist—"

"And," interrupted the assessor, imitating the speaker's voice, "Uncle, I hope, said: 'Dear Bernardi, you are making a mistake; you do not play badly, but at the present day a great deal more is required of a virtuoso.'"

"What a man!" said von Rost softly to his neighbor; "he is saved with difficulty from committing one rash act only to commit a more foolish one—he is simply beside himself."

Suddenly Moritz rose. In his mood it was impossible for him to remain amid that tumult any longer.

"Are you going?" asked Hegebach. "I will go with you, if you will permit me."

"You live in the hotel, do you not?" Moritz asked in the hall.

"Yes; but I will walk along with you, Ratenow."

The streets were deserted, the moonlight flooded the city, and a fine mist hung like a silver veil over the house-tops and trees.

The two men walked silently side by side; neither knew just how to open the conversation.

"My dear Ratenow," at length said the elder man, "I should not like to have you judge me falsely. You looked at me so strangely a short while since. I am neither vain enough to think that so young a girl as Elsie von Hegebach will sink with delight into my open arms, nor am I at that age when one restlessly awaits the decisive words from a pair of rosy lips and contemplates suicide if they chance to prove unsatisfactory. I have had to bear too many heavy, sorrowful blows. The reasons which impelled me to woo my cousin were partly selfish in nature; for that is the only way in which I can render it legal for my cousin and his child to obtain a portion of our uncle's fortune. But—" he stopped, and laid his hand upon his companion's shoulder, "I must add that I should not have devised that plan had not the young girl pleased me; at my age, one no longer speaks of passion."

They proceeded on their way. Moritz was silent; he knew that the man beside him spoke the truth; he knew that he could have his choice among many, for he was still a handsome man; he was a man who had a noble, generous heart, a right to happiness, and yet—"

"During the past few weeks, I have pictured to myself how it would all be," continued Hegebach with a soft intonation; "I have seen Elsie's form passing through my rooms, I have heard her voice in my ear; I set apart a suite of apartments for my cousin, and I planned the route for our journey on the other side of the Alps. God knows, Ratenow, it would give me infinite pleasure to show to that young creature the thousand and one beauties with which the hand of nature and of man has adorned the world—" he hesitated. "I once traveled through the Black Forest to Switzerland with my eldest boy, and I shall never forget the pleasure afforded me by the naive astonishment and delight of the child. I should like to see those same feelings once more. Ratenow," he asked suddenly. "is not someone coming?"

They were standing at the entrance to the alley; the dark tree-trunks stood out boldly in the moonlight and through the mist came a slender form.

"It is a woman," said Moritz; "it is Elsie!" he added the next instant. "Elsie, for God's sake, Elsie, where are you going?"

She fell upon his neck: he could feel her frame tremble.

"To father, Moritz. Take me to my father."

"What has happened, Elsie? Speak!" He unclasped her arms from about his neck and looked into her ghastly face.

"Ill!" said she with quivering lips. "Siethmann came for me and I ran away—take me there, Moritz."

He drew her arm through his. "Come, my girl."

"I will go too," said Hegebach. "Has a doctor been sent for, do you know, Elsie?"

She shook her head and ran on before them; the men had difficulty in following her. She wore neither hat nor cloak, and in the uncertain light there was something uncanny about her movements.

She was already at the head of the stairs when Moritz and Hegebach entered the door. In the dark hall they met the doctor.

"Come in, sirs," said he softly; "I have sent for his daughter, he will not live until morning."

They entered a small room adjoining Hegebach's. Tick-tack, tick-tack, said the old Black Forest clock, and through the half-open door came the sound of painful moans.

"Papa!" cried a voice. "Do not go away from me, do not leave me alone, so terribly alone!"

The physician took a step toward the door, then he paused—the dying man replied with difficulty.

"No, no, papa, do not die—do not die! I have something to tell you, dear papa! Listen to me—can you hear me?"

The doctor entered the room. In a few minutes he returned and beckoned to Hegebach. The latter went into the chamber of Death; his eyes sought the girl. She was kneeling beside the arm-chair in which her father reclined; her arms were about his knees; the old man's right hand lay upon her head; his dim eyes were turned toward Hegebach.

"It has come suddenly, cousin—but I am more contented than I was—Elsie, give me your hand. I have done nothing for you in life, poor child, forgive me, Elsie; make it easy for me to die—life has been so hard—"

She raised her head and looked about her as if begging for mercy, but the dim eyes no longer saw her glance, no longer understood what she implored. His hand sought hers and when it touched it, he made a feeble attempt to lift and draw it over in order to place it within another. The sacred majesty of Death awed Elsie as she gazed upon her father's changed features; feebly she yielded to its influence; her hand was clasped in a warm, manly embrace, and the right hand of the dying

man rested upon them both. "Wilhelm, dear Wilhelm," said a rich, deep voice, "I promise to guard and protect her."

"Elsie!" murmured the dying man, "you will not be alone! You will be no—poor—unprotected girl—no, Elsie—"

She knelt beside him, her head upon his knee, her hand still within Hegebach's: it seemed to her as if a blood-red mist floated before her eyes and she could no longer think clearly. Then she heard Moritz's voice say once more: "It is over; come Elsie, my girl!" She felt someone raise her and she lost consciousness. When she revived, Frau von Ratenow sat beside the sofa upon which she had been laid; the old lady in morning-gown and cap was asleep in her chair. Through the window glinted the rays of the rising sun, casting a roseate glow over the tiny chamber.

XII.

The young girl started up; the scene of the preceding night reoccurred to her. She passed her hand over her brow; was it reality? As if to convince herself, she rose, glided past the sleeping Frau von Ratenow into the next room. The windows were open, and over that which lay upon the bed, had been spread a white sheet.

She gazed at it; her heart felt chilled and involuntarily she clasped her hands.

"Our Father, who art in Heaven!" resounded within her, for she felt impelled to pray; yet she had not the power to put her anguish, her supplications into words—"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Then a loud blast re-echoed through the room; below in the street a trumpeter was sounding the reveille.

"Come, Elsie, child, that will awaken him no more," said Frau von Ratenow, drawing the girl to her bosom. "He is at rest, my dear, and we would not recall him—would we?"

XIII.

The interment was over. On leaving the cemetery, Lieutenant von Rost strolled across the road in order to greet his betrothed and her mother who were taking a walk, probably not solely for the sake of obtaining fresh air, but rather to see something of the funeral procession. Frau Cramm had a weakness for such things, and so had Annie; a large fire, a wedding or a funeral always attracted them to the vicinity.

The lieutenant bowed, and walked by Annie's side without offering her his arm.

"Dear von Rost," said her mother, "have you heard how Fraulien von Hegebach is? Annie told me she was almost stunned by grief."

The younger lady nodded. "Only think, Leo, I was there a short while ago—she did not speak a word, and looked so pitiful; she was not so very devoted to the old man and there is really no occasion for such despondency! Nevertheless she seems crushed—can you understand that?"

He dropped his eyeglass. "It might be possible,"

he replied, "after having two such shocks at once."

"Two!" mother and daughter exclaimed simultaneously.

He paused a moment and then said: "She promised to marry Hegebach at her father's death-bed."

A cry of astonishment reached his ear.

"How lucky the girl is!" said Frau Cramm.

"It is surprising, is it not?" asked Lieutenant von Rost, in a tone which left his hearer in doubt as to whether he was ironical or serious.

"A great piece of luck!" repeated Frau Cramm.

"Beautiful Bennewitz and that magnificent carriage! Last year Prince H — was there to a hunt, too!"

Annie did not speak; she was thinking how Elsie had pored over her books at school and had studied for her examination, how simply she had always dressed. Yes, truly, that was luck! Who would have thought it!

The news of an engagement between the orphan and Hegebach flew through the village on the wings of the wind!

Elsie sat in her tiny room, meanwhile, in her mourning gown; above the somber crape ruche in the neck of her dress, rose her pale, spirituelle face, with the infinitely melancholy expression about the mouth.

She had spoken very little since that morning.

She had not wept, but she went about with a troubled air, sat in one place, then in another, her hands in her lap, looking gloomily at the ground; food scarcely passed her lips; sleep did not visit her eyelids. She saw her dying father's changed face constantly; she felt him clasp her hand; she felt the chain she was to wear through life, that invisible, repulsive chain. Was it not wrong to make use of the sacred power of the hour of death to render a human heart miserable forever?

"Father, you did not love me!" she moaned.

She saw the happy smile light up his face when he joined their hands; she heard the last deep sigh of relief escape his breast; *he* died contented—and *she* must live! It was insupportable!

She had not again seen him in whose hand her father had laid hers, nor had Frau von Ratenow urged her. Such deep, silent sorrow was not consistent with the happiness of a prospective bride. But upon returning from the funeral the lover wished to speak to her who had been intrusted to him in that sacred hour.

Frau von Ratenow, dressed in deep mourning, mounted the stairs to tell Elsie of the important visit she was about to receive. In her hand she held a couple of sprigs of cypress which Hegebach had taken from the coffin before it was lowered. The stately woman knocked less resolutely than usual at the door, and entered.

Elsie was seated at the table; before her lay writing-paper and a pen; she put the letter she had commenced in her portfolio and rose.

Frau von Ratenow laid the sprig of cypress in her small hand and patted her pale cheek.

"Hegebach sends his compliments; he thought you would like to visit the grave with him; the carriage is waiting, Elsie. Will you get ready? He will come up to fetch you."

At the words "with him" she started, and for an instant her pale face was suffused with a bright blush. She did not reply, but she slowly shook her fair head.

"Why have you lowered all the shades," asked the old lady, "as if God's sunshine were objectionable?" And she raised them, letting in the dazzling sunlight, which was so bright that Elsie was forced to close her eyes.

"Look out, Elsie!" Frau von Ratenow took her hand and drew her to the window. "See the buds upon the apple-trees and the blue sky! One should pay proper respect to the dead, child, but one should not forget the living! You have duties to perform. Take courage!"

The girl did not raise her eyes—if possible she grew paler.

"I am going downstairs, Elsie, I have something to say to Frieda. I will send Hegebach to you.

When you return from the cemetery, you must take a cup of coffee in my room. Farewell, Elsie."

She left the room. In her anguish the girl beat her brow and tore her hair. Was there no escape? Almost wildly she glanced about the room. She was to fulfill a promise against which her heart rebelled. Ah, to be free, to be free once more! Mechanically she put on her cloak and hat. As she was in the act of tying the strings, her hands fell to her sides—there he stood upon the threshold!

"Cousin!" she stammered.

He approached her and took both of her hands in his; then he raised them to his lips.

"My dear Elsie," said he tenderly, "it was a sad hour in which we plighted our troth, but at the same time it was serious and sacred, it was the pledge of a future life spent together in affection and faith."

He spoke earnestly, but what he said sounded almost pedantic. Elsie heaved a sigh of relief, but she did not speak.

"Shall we visit your father's grave together, Elsie?"

She nodded.

He took her parasol from the table, handed it to her and offered her his arm; she laid her hand lightly upon it; they left the room, descended the

stairs and passed through the hall to the carriage. He helped her into the elegantly upholstered vehicle and carefully spread the costly robe over her. As they drove off, she raised her eyes for the first time. Frau von Ratenow was at the window and waved her hand.

An infinitely miserable sensation stole over the girl as she rolled along in the finely appointed carriage; she felt as if she had been sold, as if she had no self-respect left, and with a hasty movement she drew her crape veil over her face, for she felt ashamed to have the bright, clear spring sunshine in her eyes.

She did not notice Hegebach's proffered arm at the entrance to the cemetery; she walked quickly on ahead.

"Where are you going, Elsie?" he asked. "The grave is on this side."

But she had already sunk upon another mound, her hands clasped in despairing prayer. If *she* were only alive, then—a mother would not force a child into a loveless marriage!

Hegebach stood to one side, waiting patiently. It was some time before she rose, turned and followed him to the new mound upon which the clods were still uneven. She stood there too, without a word, with not a tear; he seized her hand which she gently drew away.

"Shall we go?" he asked after a silence of fifteen minutes.

She assented, again preceding him along the narrow path between the graves. At the carriage, she hesitated; she would much rather have walked. Silently he offered her his hand in order to assist her, and seated himself silently beside her. He knew what it was to return home from a newly-made grave; he could sympathize with her. Her brown, child-like eyes should learn to smile once more when they did not need to look upon want and care. She would smile again when they traveled. He would take her to Paris first; she was only mortal, and Paris—well, Paris is an indefinably alluring word to the feminine ear. Elsie's veil was over her face; she looked neither to the right nor left.

On the way home, they passed Lieutenant von Rost and Captain von P. They bowed low and looked after the carriage and the black veil which for a moment fluttered out of the winodw.

"She has not yet learned," said Rost, "how a 'grande dame' reclines among the cushions; she sat there as a scolded child does upon the school-form. However, it will not take her long to learn; women are wonderfully apt in such things."

"Do you believe that she loves him?" asked von P.

"Pshaw!" replied Rost, glancing at his horse which the groom was leading toward him.

XIV.

Frau von Ratenow had, in the meantime, been with Frieda; the latter's mood had not changed for the better. She had scarcely a word of sympathy for the orphan. Lili had gone upstairs once with the intention of condoling very coldly, but in the presence of the grieving, sorrowful girl, her kind, little heart had been touched, her eyes were swollen from weeping when she returned to Frieda.

"What are you crying for," asked Frieda, irritably; "she has made her fortune! Do not imitate Moritz; he speaks of that engagement as if it were a dire misfortune!"

"But Frieda, in spite of sorrow, if one is the least bit happy, one does not look like that! No, Frieda, you are cross and want someone upon whom to vent your anger. I know you, little sister! She took away one of your admirers once, Friedchen, did she not? Of Moritz you cannot be seriously jealous; he has never in his life cared for anyone but you."

But neither raillery nor exhortation had the power to banish Frieda's ill-nature. Respect was

being paid to Elsie's sorrow; she was no longer an insignificant person, she was the betrothed of a man who moved in the best circles of society in the provinces. Frieda, therefore, put a coral brooch upon her dark blue dress, for she did not wear mourning like the rest; what did she care for the old man who had closed his weary eyes forever?

Frau von Ratenow entered her room with such an expression of satisfaction upon her full face that her black crape cap was a great contrast to it. All that she had hoped for the girl had come to pass; she had really drawn a big prize. How well she deported herself—so gravely, so calmly, and yet so proudly; and how pretty she looked in her black dress! Not once had she attempted to evade her good-fortune, as she had before her father's death. Elsie had no doubt gladly grasped the hand held out to her just at the moment when her bark was beginning to ride rudderless upon the wild sea of life!

"Elsie is a good, sensible girl; God bless her!"

Grief for the departed was not very deeply rooted as far as the old lady was concerned. Of course one thing she regretted: that he could not have lived to enjoy a few years of peace, but the Almighty knew best; he and the owner of Bennewitz had never agreed very well, possibly he might have disturbed the perfect harmony. Then, too, he had

always been sickly—yes, yes, he was released—might he rest in peace.

With a pleasant "Good morning!" Frau von Ratenow sank upon one of Frieda's fragile chairs and inquired so particularly for her grandchildren, that Frieda stared at her in astonishment.

"Friedchen," she continued, "what have you against Elsie? Your foolish fancies of a few days ago, have, I hope, fled."

She took her daughter-in-law's hand. "Listen, pet, a great burden is lifted from my mind; you can probably see that—and—when I am pleased, you know, I like to have others pleased too. You may select something unusually nice for your birthday, Friedchen. What would you like? Out with it! Lili, help her!"

Still Frieda did not look amiable, although the last words sounded tempting to her, for Mamma Ratenow was always very generous in her gifts.

"You are very kind, mamma," came hesitatingly from her full, rosy lips, "I—"

"Well, take time enough to think it over. Do not decide hastily. How would you like to take a trip with Moritz to Baden-Baden, Switzerland and the Italian lakes? I would take care of the children. Think it over, my dear. Good morning. I must go in search of Moritz. Good morning, children!"

Ah, the old lady indeed knew how to strike the tune to which each one gladly danced!

The two sisters, when the door closed upon Frau von Ratenow, seated themselves upon the couch and turned over the pages of the latest fashion journal; there was a pretty traveling costume. Oh, delightful words—*traveling! Baden-Baden!*

Moritz was the one who had opposed the scheme.

"What ails you, boy?" asked his mother. "How can you take that stupid jealousy so to heart? Frieda is on the high-road to becoming tractable."

"You are mistaken, mother. I have simply ignored Frieda's caprice, but I must confess that her conduct wounded me. It may be, too, that she was right in a way. I was, perhaps, overanxious as to Elsie's future."

During that conversation they crossed the court together. A carriage rolled through the gate and drew up at the steps.

"The betrothed, Moritz," said Frau von Ratenow, quickening her pace. "Shall we join them?"

Her son raised his cap from his fair locks, and with a bow, turned toward the stables.

"I must see to Sultana; the veterinary surgeon is coming to-day to attend to her foot."

"It is strange," muttered the old lady, hurrying on; she met the couple at the door, and pressed Elsie's small hand. The latter looked so odd, so

stiff and resolute. She had cause enough in her father's death, had she only wept!

She maintained that same stony manner when seated in the easy-chair in her aunt's cozy room; the doors leading into the conservatory were open, and a soft, balmy breeze blew in upon her. Elsie turned her head and looked at the flowers; she did not utter a word; she did not take the least part in the conversation. Why should she? She seemed to herself like one who had been ejected from a blooming paradise and transplanted in a snowy, icy desert. From the other side, budding roses nodded to her and asked: "Why did you let them force you?" The swallows flew by and twittered: "Was that your courage? are you not ashamed?"

She was ashamed; shame, genuine, maidenly shame possessed her; she rose and hastened out onto the terrace and from thence into the garden.

"Dear Frau von Ratenow," asked Hegebach, as Elsie left the room so suddenly, "is my betrothed ill? I must honestly confess that this mute despair makes me anxious; can it really be the shock of that sudden death alone which has so entirely changed her?"

The old lady shook her head.

"My dear Hegebach! The girls of to-day are different from those of our time. And, moreover, you know it is the day of the funeral, and notwith-

standing his treatment of her, she was devotedly attached to her father."

"Is that your opinion, madame?" he asked slowly. "I am not so sure. A short while ago she seemed to me like a child; it was the expression of her eyes principally which made me think of her as such. When I went upstairs to-day to fetch her, she glanced at me so reproachfully—ah, you may call me sentimental, madame—but I cannot forget that glance! A pair of eyes looked at me that way once before and I shall never forget them. It was in Russia; a young gypsy girl stood by the wayside begging. My coachman, a rough fellow, cracked his whip about her head; she did not flinch but she turned her dark eyes toward me, and a world of sadness lay in them. Elsie had the same expression in her eyes, the same painfully compressed lips, as I approached her to-day. And—I cannot help it, I must give utterance to it, there is more in it than grief for her father."

"Hegebach!" cried Frau von Ratenow in a tone of the deepest reproof. A strange sensation possessed the old lady at his words. She shook her head and looked searchingly at her vis-a-vis, but she did not know what to reply.

In her perplexity she took up the coffee-can and filled her cup; then she rose, gave her guest a cigar,

and asked: "Where can Elsie be? Shall we walk through the garden?" They strolled along the paths, but they did not find Elsie. Frau von Ratenow said: "I do not know where Elsie can be; she is a strange girl." And she cried: "Elsie! Elsie!" in her full, strong voice, but she received no reply.

"I beseech you, dearest madame, let her go," said Hegebach; "she is probably not inclined to talk; I can sympathize with her."

They walked on in silence. Occasionally Hegebach paused, examined the budding shrubs and gave her their botanical names. Frau von Ratenow did not answer him.

"I must leave early to-day." Hegebach drew out his watch. "Pray remember me to Elsie."

"I will send someone to look for her, dear Hegebach."

"No, I beg of you, do not. She has probably found relief in tears; do not disturb her, madame; I will come again to-morrow."

He bade a gardener, who passed them, see that his carriage was brought around, then he smoked calmly on and made a few trifling remarks.

"Apropos, dear Hegebach," said the old lady, "what did you say was the name of the firm of whom you ordered the engagement rings?"

"Haller & Co.," he replied. "They will not be finished for a week."

"Of course not," said she, "such houses are always so busy. Thomas, here on the Marke-platz, would have made them just as well and much sooner. But in that you are like all the rest, Hegebach."

He smiled, but did not reply.

"I believe the carriage is already at the door," he said at length. "Good-bye, madame, until to-morrow—my love to my sad, little Elsie."

He kissed her hand, ascended the steps of the terrace, and disappeared within the house. In a few moments his carriage rolled over the paved court.

"Of course, Hegebach is vexed," said Frau von Ratenow, who was still standing at the foot of the steps; "such conduct is incomprehensible. Oh, Lord, what trouble one has with young people! She should have been my father's daughter."

She turned and hastily walked along the path. Very well! That day she would say nothing—but to-morrow she should have a talk with her. It was exceedingly rude to run away like that, and it was dangerous.

"What can have come over Hegebach that at his age he should look into the child's eyes like a school-boy, that is certainly not necessary; it does not suit him to be so languishing, so soft-hearted; he was not always that way."

She passed her hand over her forehead and after a few minutes appeared in the dairy like a somber apparition, and frightened the maid almost out of her senses; she had not expected to see her mistress, but supposed she was drinking coffee with Elsie and Hegebach upstairs.

"Well, why don't you faint," said Frau von Ratenow in her loud voice; "that is fashionable now."

She went from one pan to another and looked in all the butter jars.

When she returned to her room, she was very restless; she could not even knit; she saw Elsie's pale face constantly, and heard Hegebach talking foolishly of her eyes.

It could not be helped, she must tell her kindly. But tell her she must! She rose in order to go upstairs to Elsie's room, when Moritz entered and seated himself in his father's chair opposite her, for he had all sorts of matters which must be treated of. To his question: "Is Hegebach gone?" she replied briefly: "You see he has!" and he hastily proceeded to talk of farm matters, so that his mother had no opportunity to tell him how the girl had behaved.

"Where is Elsie?" he asked.

"Probably upstairs. But how is it that you allow the young veterinary surgeon to attend to Sultana? I just saw him leave the stable."

"I did not want to let my favorite wait any longer and the other surgeon is ill."

"Is that so?" she said; but she was thinking of something else.

Then Frieda and Lili came in with the children; Lili was so merry and the children so comical; the room was filled with laughter and mirth. When the little ones said "Good night" it was already late, the moonlight lay dazzlingly bright upon the house-tops. "Will you sup with me?" asked Moritz. "Is Elsie coming down?"

"Thank you," replied Frau von Ratenow. "Sophie will serve supper here; Elsie is in no condition to visit, you know."

"Then good night, mother." As Moritz left the room, the old lady rose hastily from her chair; she must speak with Elsie. Quickly she mounted the stairs and pushed open the door of the girl's room; it was flooded with moonlight and pervaded with the odor of violets. Silence reigned within that chamber—not a sound was to be heard.

"Elsie!" said she softly, looking around the room.

There lay Elsie upon the bed! The old lady approached and bent over her. She was asleep. In her hand she clasped tightly a faded bunch of violets. At the foot of the bed stood an old trunk; it was open and from it peeped forth a white dress with pink ribbons. Frau von Ratenow knew the

dress, and she knew the bunch of violets; she saw Elsie before her as she had seen her that evening with her happy, child-like eyes. Motionless she stood there; she felt strangely moved; was her emotion caused by the scent of the violets and the song of the nightingale?

At length she stole away, passed down the corridor, entered her dark room and stood there a long time, her hand upon her brow.

"Nonsense!" said she finally, going to the table on which stood the matches.

"Nonsense!" she repeated aloud, as she struck a light. "To-morrow I will have something to say to her!"

XV.

Early in the morning, rain fell and heavy clouds veiled the rising sun—but the grass was green, very green after the showers. The servants were astir in the outhouses, but all was silent in the manor; through the corridor only soft footsteps glided, descended the stairs, crossed the lower hall, the kitchen and the servant's hall and passed out into the open air.

It was chilly, and Elsie von Hegebach lowered her veil, crossed the court and glided through the gate. The maid who was just entering the dairy looked at her with a shake of her head.

"I believe she is going to the cemetery," said she to the kitchen-maid.

"She had a sachel in her hand," said the other, and the two women went about their work.

In the door of the stable stood a tall, fair man, looking after her with his honest blue eyes and grave face. He knew what she was doing, and he made no attempt to follow, to detain her.

"Where can she be going?" he wondered half-aloud, and stood there motionlessly until her form

had disappeared. Then he turned to the sick horse, patted its glossy neck as it looked at him with its intelligent eyes, and when half an hour later he crossed the court and entered the house, he heard the shriek of the locomotive in the distance. "Farewell, Elsie, my girl," said he softly. "Have you acted wisely? I do not know—but that you are doing right now, I *do* know." At nine o'clock Frau von Ratenow sent the maid upstairs to ask Fraulein von Hegebach to come to her room. The old lady sat by the window as usual looking out very gravely; she was somewhat pale; she had spent a miserable night; she had been disturbed by annoying dreams and all kinds of dim forebodings —the white dress, the faded bunch of violets and Elsie's strange manner were accountable for it all. The old lady was angry with herself; she should have aroused Elsie that night and should have scolded her! Should she think of another when she was affianced? and what was that other? a young man, like dozens of others, remarkable for nothing but a talent for violin-playing.

There must be an end to it; it must be done kindly—but there must be an end!

"The young lady is not in her room," said the maid, returning.

"Then seek her in the garden," was the command.

The maid replied: "I do not think we will find

her there either, madame. The housekeeper says that Fraulein von Hegebach went to the cemetery bright and early this morning."

The old lady rose. "About what time?"

"About four o'clock, madame," said the girl.

"It is now nine. Go into the garden and look for her."

Frau von Ratenow resumed her seat calmly and gazed out into the court. She was not alarmed, but where could Elsie be? She would come though.

"I cannot find Miss Elsie!" announced the servant.

"Dorte says, too, that she had a sachel in her hand."

"Very well, she will be here soon, I have no doubt."

The servant left the room.

For a while the old lady remained in her chair, then she mounted the stairs and entered Elsie's room. All was as usual there—nothing was gone but the little portfolio, the crucifix over the bed and her prayer book; but that she had not yet discovered. The trunk was closed, and when Frau von Ratenow raised the lid, she saw within it the crumpled, white dress carefully folded.

"She will soon be here. Heaven knows what she is doing this morning."

She approached the small table under the hanging book-shelf—there lay a letter! A sealed letter!

"To Frau von Ratenow," she read. She sat down and broke the seal slowly without any apparent haste, though she was pale to her very lips.

"DEAR, DEAR AUNT:

"Do not look upon me as very ungrateful for leaving your house in which so much kindness has been shown me during my entire life. No choice was left me. I stood alone and unprotected against you all. I had only strength enough to fly. I could not live with a lie in my heart! I could not tell the truth. I wanted to do so yesterday when I stood beside papa's grave with Herr von Hegebach, but I could not utter a word. I do not know if you will understand me, aunt. But I pray to the Almighty that you will not judge me harshly.

"Whence I shall go from D—, I will inform Herr von Hegebach. I know he is too honorable not to give me back a promise which was exacted from me in a moment of weakness and anxiety.

"Farewell, dear aunt, I am and shall always remain,

"Your grateful and loving niece,

"ELSIE VON HEGEBACH."

"N. B.—I can at any time obtain a position as assistant governess at D—, so do not worry as to my future."

The note fell from Frau von Ratenow's trem-

bling hands. Could it be possible? Once more she looked at the letter for fear she had not read it correctly; then she glanced at the clock, and as if oppressed by the weight of a heavy burden, she rose and sought her room. She rang and bade the maid inform her son that she wished to see him.

"The baron has gone out," was the reply.

The old lady went into her bedroom and tried to gather together the things required upon a journey; but she could not find what she wanted; as she packed her sachel she often put her hand to her head, then, she took up a time table and examined it: the train left at eleven o'clock.

She rang once more, ordered the carriage and sent John word that he was to take a note to Bennewitz immediately.

"Herr von Hegebach is in town; I saw his carriage this morning," timidly ventured the maid.

Was everything and everyone possessed that day? "Very well," said she, her heart swelling with anger. That was her reward for all her love! She had run away as they did in novels; she had thoughtlessly rejected everything that had fallen to her fortunate lot; she had compromised herself and the house in which she had found a home.

Whence had the gentle girl with the soft brown eyes obtained her strength? She must not be humored; the letter to Hegebach must not be writ-

ten at any price. She seated herself at her writing-desk and wrote out a telegram to the principal of the institute at D—, asking her to tell Elsie not to write a line until she had seen her; that she was coming on the midnight train. She sent the maid off with the sealed dispatch and then wrote to Hegebach; he must be either at the hotel, at the Town Hall, or at his lawyer's, she thought. He must not come to the castle; some excuse must be invented.

How difficult was it for that upright, truthful woman to lie; she destroyed three sheets of paper. Elsie had a headache, she wrote at first; but surely he would find out that she had gone out. She had been suddenly compelled to take a short journey. Bah! whither should she go? He would divine that something was wrong! No, she could not lie, come what might; she saw no outlet. If Moritz were only at home! "Herr von Hegebach's compliments." The servant entered with a bouquet of lilies of the valley for Fraulien von Hegebach and a letter for Frau von Ratenow.

"Carry the bouquet to Miss Elsie's room," said she, breaking the seal of her letter. It ran thus:

"My intention, dear Frau von Ratenow, of dining with you this evening has unfortunately been frustrated: I must return to Bennewitz at once, for the building committee of the M. Railroad are

going to survey the strip of land which runs through my estate.

"Excuse haste; I hope to spend a few hours with you and my fiancee to-morrow in your cozy home. Respectfully,

"HERMANN VON HEGEBACH."

"Thank God for that respite!" Frau von Ratenow's courage revived; she could leave at eleven o'clock; she could, too, count upon Sister Beate's kind assistance. The girl must not be allowed to fling aside her happiness thus! She hastily began her preparations. Lord, what one had to go through for such a perverse creature! How she disliked traveling by rail! Suddenly another plan occurred to her, as she heard the tramp of a horse's hoofs; she hastened to the window. Yes, it was he.

"Moritz!" she called.

Her son bowed and replied: "Directly, mother!"

When he entered her room, she exclaimed irritably: "How slow you are!"

"Were you in a hurry, mother? Pardon me."

"It is now a quarter of eleven, Moritz—will you do me a favor? You know I am not very fond of traveling; will you go to D— and reason with Elsie? she always cared most for you! You know nothing about it yet—that the child has run away? Or do you? Moritz, do you know anything?" She looked searchingly at him.

He maintained his composure. "Yes, mother, I saw her go."

"Moritz! and you did not detain her? you did not try to keep her from carrying out her foolish, sentimental ideas?"

"No, mother. I had no right to do so."

"My God, Moritz!" The old lady was crimson with rage.

"No right," he repeated. "Neither you nor I had the right! Thank God, no one in this country has the right to force a girl to marry against her will."

"This is enough to drive one mad! What fine speeches you make! What impelled her to that step?"

"Everything! People, circumstances, life and death, mother. Her heart cried 'No,' but no one heeded it."

"Why did it cry 'No,' Moritz? Can you tell me why?"

"Yes, but do not inquire into it, mother. Who has fathomed the mysterious bond which draws one person to another, or repels one from another?"

"You talk like a poet, Moritz; look about you in the world, it is day, broad daylight. Human life is prosaic, not an idyl—it is a struggle and everyone is striving to obtain a place."

"And that which guides the wheels in love, mother; she will not suffer herself to be banished

from the world, if she does cause the realists so much trouble. Love and faith are in the German blood, mother!" he nodded his head emphatically.

"Love?" The old lady sprang from her chair. "Love?" she repeated. "You are alluding to the little lieutenant. What is he compared to Hegebach? A nonenity, a nothing - he can make gallant bows and fiddle a little—that is all!"

"*I* think him a very nice fellow," averred Moritz. "If Bernardi were Hegebach's son, for example, what then, mother?"

"That would be very different, my boy. But enough of this sentimentality. Will you go?" she asked. "Will you reason with Elsie? She can surely not marry Bernardi, for no doubt he has found consolation long ago."

"In one thing I agree with you, mother—he cannot marry her. That he has forgotten her, I do not believe, for this morning Rost's servant brought a beautiful wreath at Bernardi's order for the grave. I will go to Elsie, but, mother, I have told you once, I will not persuade the child."

"Very well then, I will go!"

"Do not urge her, mother, it is not right!"

"Shall she reproach me later on, when she has become a nervous, worn-out governess?" she asked. "I shall do my duty."

"It will be in vain, mother, especially in her present excited condition."

"Heaven helps those who help themselves," said she. "You are still the old dreamer."

With those words she passed into her bedroom.

XVI.

Elsie was being whirled over the same road she had taken once before. Then it was autumn and evening; her heart was filled with expectation; now it was a spring morning; the sun shone so brightly upon the carriage cushions and showed every tear and threadbare place; the tiny mirror in a gilt frame reflected a pale face with an expression of weariness, about the mouth. Elsie leaned languidly back among the cushions, her eyes fixed upon the landscape. She had broken the link which bound her to the castle; she had no one, no heart which beat in sympathy with hers. Even Aunt Lott had written her a delighted, half-sentimental letter relative to the good fortune which had befallen her. Good fortune! People called *that* good fortune? What was it?

To bear the name of a man, to share his wealth, not to have to worry about the manifold material needs—that was "good fortune" to them! And in the return for that she was to give everything—her freedom, her hopes, herself, body and soul.

She shuddered and closed her eyes.

"Never!" said she, so loudly that she was startled by her own voice, and that the old lady opposite her looked up in surprise. Her eyes were cast down; she did not notice it; she saw before her a dark-complexioned man, with sorrowful eyes; in her ears rang the sleigh-bells and the perfume of violets hovered around her. And yet he had turned from her, had deserted her—because she was a poor girl! She started up suddenly.

"Dear child, are you ill?" asked a sympathetic voice, and the old lady bent over her.

"No, no!" said she hastily, blushing deeply. "I did not sleep in the night, and—"

"Pardon me, my dear young lady!" The lady resumed her seat. Then she took up a box, in it lay a number of bunches of violets. "My grandchildren picked them for me; may I offer you one?" And she held the fragrant purple flowers toward the girl.

Her tiny hand received them, but no word of thanks passed her lips. The donor only saw her draw her black veil hastily over her face and press the flowers to her lips beneath it. After a while she fancied she heard sobs, but they had a tearless sound.

"She has sorrow too, and she is still so young," she murmured, looking out of the window.

At the stations all was animation; the coupe was

occasionally filled for a short distance and then was vacant again. The old lady left the coupe. She stood upon the platform and watched the train as it slowly steamed out; she would like to have seen that sad, child-like face once more, but her wish was vain. Elsie sat as motionlessly as ever, in her corner.

At length she too reached her destination and stepped upon the platform of the, to her, familiar station; it seemed to her as if she were dreaming. There was the Thuringen Wald as she had seen it a hundred times, and before her stretched the street with its neat, old-fashioned houses, in the windows of which flowers bloomed in profusion; farther on was the tiny church with its shady green churchyard. All so unchanged, while she was not herself.

Rapidly she proceeded down the street and passed through the school-garden. Not a soul to be seen—thank God! All were still at work and in the school-rooms.

The canary was warbling clearly in his gilded cage in Sister Beate's room. She knocked and slowly crossed the threshold of the little room, in her mourning garb, her veil over her pale face!

"Elizabeth!" said a deep, calm voice, "is it really you, Elizabeth?" An old lady advanced toward her, and a pair of kindly eyes looked into her sorrowful face.

"Sister Beate," she tried to say, but she could utter no sound. She threw both arms around the woman's neck and her pent-up grief dissolved into an almost convulsive fit of weeping.

"You are in mourning, poor child?"

"My father," she stammered.

Sister Beate kissed her hand sympathetically and led her to the old-fashioned sofa. "Calm yourself first, Elizabeth; we will talk afterward. Come, take a cup of coffee. I knew that you were coming—a dispatch is here."

"From whom?" Elsie glanced at the speaker in terror. "What is it? What does the telegram say?" she added quickly.

"I am to keep you from writing any letters, child, for your aunt will arrive here this evening."

Elsie trembled and at first did not speak. At length she sobbed: "Sister Beate, keep me that I may not sin as deeply as woman could ever sin—help me that I may not be ruined!"

"Elizabeth, you are beside yourself!" said the sister in her calm, warning voice.

Elsie's clasped hands fell into her lap. She looked moodily and searchingly into the face of the woman before her.

"Sister Beate," she continued, in a changed voice, "you told me when I left here that I could always find shelter with you, that you would give

me a position in the school. I have come to-day to ask it of you."

"You have come at an opportune time, dear Elizabeth. Sister Angelica's position in the fourth form is vacant." The speaker held toward the girl, as she spoke, a plate of cake. She refused it.

"Where is Sister Angelica?"

"She has gone to Africa. You should eat, you look so fatigued."

"To Africa? As a missionary?"

"Yes, she is going to help her husband who has a school at Natal. The lot fell to her, and she left three weeks ago."

Those words were uttered as simply as if Sister Angelica had merely gone to church at some neighboring place.

Elsie knew the girl, and she knew too, that that particular order married its daughters by lot. She had never thought of it before; it now struck her as something unworthy of humanity.

"Did she go willingly, Sister Beate?" she asked, putting her hand to her aching head.

"Willingly? That God alone knows. But *she* knew He willed it so, and she went."

A pause ensued. The atmosphere indoors seemed to the girl suffocatingly heavy. Sister Beate was seated at a table correcting exercises.

"You should have rested awhile, Elizabeth; you look so pale and weary," said she.

The girl shook her head and approaching her laid her hand upon the sister's shoulder.

"Sister Beate," she began in an unsteady voice, "you told me once—not very long since—that truth was the only thing that would rescue one from difficulty and distress—that truth was the greatest of all virtues."

The old lady nodded assent without looking up.

"What I am about to ask you, Sister Beate, may sound strange; Angelica had never loved, had she? she did not go to the altar with a lie upon her lips and in her heart?"

The sister raised her eyes at that question.

"No, Elizabeth, her heart was like a blank page; we live such a secluded, peaceful life here that the passions never cross our threshold—the passions which grieve and wound human hearts in the world: we scarcely know them by hearsay. You must have known that, Elizabeth. Why that question?"

Suddenly the girl fell upon her knees before Sister Beate and buried her face in the folds of her dress.

"I wish I had never left here—I wish I had never seen him," she sobbed.

"Rise, Elizabeth, and compose yourself." The woman compassionately stroked Elsie's hair.

"Help me, Sister Beate," besought Elsie once more, raising her tearful eyes, "to keep from lying.

Tell my aunt that I must write to him and tell him the truth at any price."

"To him, Elizabeth?"

"Yes, to him whom they have called my betrothed for three days."

At first Sister Beate made no reply, then she said: "You were always my favorite, Elizabeth; but will you like it here? It is not so easy after having been in the gay world to settle down as a teacher with nothing but duty and the hands of the clock which indicate the time before one's eyes. Years ago a beloved pupil came back tired of the world and discouraged, and she implored me to keep her forever. At first all went well; she worked in order to drown her sad thoughts; the rest and regularity benefited her unstrung nerves. But time healed her wound, health returned and beckoned her to the gay life without our circle; her eyes grew daily more yearning and finally she said: 'I am going, Sister Beate. I must go; here one creeps and in the world one flies!' So she went. I do not know what became of her. I am only telling you this to show you that this is no place in which to heal permanently the wounds inflicted by the world; if you accept the positions, you bind yourself for two years at least, Elsie. Consider it well."

She was still upon her knees; she saw pink roses

and fluttering ribbons, she heard strains of the sweetest music, laughter and song—that was life, that was youth! And like a colorless picture, suddenly rose before her the school-room with its bare walls—and she was so young! Sister Beate's last words troubled her.

Hark! From the next room came a clear, vibrating tone! Someone was playing the violin! Elsie burst into tears and bowed her head upon her folded arms which still rested upon the old lady's knee.

"I have nothing more to live for in the world, nothing more, Sister Beate," she murmured. "I will remain with you."

XVI.

There were spare rooms in the institute. The village inn was very primitive, and parents often stopped over to visit their daughters. One of the rooms had been placed at Elsie's disposal, and the best of those modest chambers was prepared for the reception of Frau von Ratenow.

The train was to arrive at nine o'clock, and the principal had gone to the station in person to receive the stern aunt.

In the meantime, Elsie sat in her little room and anxiously watched the passing clouds which occasionally obscured the moon. What was to be done? Sister Beate knew all the details and she knew Frau von Ratenow too well, not to feel assured that there would be a struggle.

According to Elsie's opinion they must have arrived from the station some time since. Probably the two women were both in the cozy sitting-room at that moment weaving the thread of her destiny.

"Elsie, Elsie," said a soft voice, "are you here, or not?"

She turned, saw a girlish form at the door and recognized the coquettish spring hat and the aristocratic face beneath it. "Lili!" she cried in surprise.

"Yes, it is I!" was the reply. "I just fancied I should find you gazing at the moon! Gracious heavens," she continued, taking off her hat, "is there not a sofa here? I am tired to death. Ah, Elsie, it was naughty of you to run away."

"Did you come with aunt, Lili? Is—is she here?"

"Why, of course." And the dainty creature cast herself upon the bed. "That is, she would have been left behind at Halle, had it not been for me. Moritz anticipated that, or he would certainly have spared me this journey. The coupe was filled with mothers, nurses, and babies, and among them, as erect as an Indian pagoda, sat Aunt Ratenow—while I—oh, Elsie, why did you do this? To-night there is a supper party at Cramm's, and I am so fond of crab-ragout with asparagus!"

Elsie did not reply; she seated herself in silence beside the bed upon which Lili lay, and looked anxiously in her face, while Lili's large eyes sparkled merrily, notwithstanding her plaintive lamentation.

"See here, Elsie, you are furnishing an abundance of matter for gossip," continued the girl. "I must confess that when Moritz gave the alarm this

morning and at the same time bade me prepare to accompany Aunt Ratenow on her search for the fugitive, I was just crazy to dine at the officers' cafe! I am convinced that the proprietor will be busy; in their excitement they will drink one glass of wine after another. And Rost will draw a vivid picture of you as a nun standing behind the lattice, and Hegebach kneeling before it with clasped hands, doublet and swords."

Elsie returned to the window.

"I do not understand you, sweet child," continued the little chatterbox. "I think Hegebach wonderfully nice. I assure you if he had asked me—I would have accepted him on the spot, although I have a so-called 'lover' too! One must have lovers you know, Elsie, otherwise of whom should one think when one reads poems? They are highly necessary; but, notwithstanding, I would have married Hegebach. How charming for '*him*' to see us bound to one another! Eternally lost love! But one need not be miserable forever; it is only so in poetry, but it is interesting, highly interesting! Elsie, do not be vexed with me," suddenly said a gentle voice behind her, and two soft arms stole around her neck. "I am not as bad as I seem to be, and if you will promise not to cry any more —do you think I cannot see it?—I will tell you something that will please you immensely."

"Nothing gives me pleasure any more, Lili," was the mournful reply.

"I have seen him, Elsie," she whispered, "in the flesh!"

"Who—my cousin?" asked the anxious girl. She dreaded hearing how he had received the blow she had prepared for him. She saw him before her so plainly as he stood beside her at her father's grave, and looked at her so kindly, so compassionately. At that time she had tried to explain to him, but lacked the strength to do so.

"Hegebach? No! I do not mean him," continued Lili. "We girls would call him *the* one, the only one! Elsie, come, do not be so childish; you are nineteen years old and you have been to boarding-school. Ah, yes," she laughed, "at a sisterhood, I always forget that; one does not learn such things there; at eighteen, girls are veritable angels of innocence. I was at G—, and from our school-room we could look down upon the court-yard of the barracks, and each of us had a '*him.*' Well, I saw *him* at Halle; Elsie, do you understand? He had his violin-case in his hand and wore his civilian dress—well, Elsie, what do you say to that?"

Elsie did not stir.

"And I spoke to him—do not start, Elsie, aunt did not see me; she was talking to a porter on the other side of the platform. I was getting the tick-

ets and he was standing among the crowd; he is really handsome, Elsie. I was not well enough acquainted to address him, but I know how to help myself under such circumstances. As I passed him my umbrella fell at his feet; of course he picked it up. 'Oh, thank you very much, Lieutenant Bernardi,' said I. He started. 'I am in a great hurry,' I continued; 'my name is Lili Teesfeld; I am going to D— with Aunt Ratenow to fetch Elsie von Hegebach who wishes to enter a convent.' You should have seen his face. 'Yes, to enter a convent,' I said, 'because she does not want to marry her cousin. Good-bye, Lieutenant Bernardi.' I left him and bravely pushed my way through the crowd; as I was about to enter the ladies' coupe, he entered the next coach. It was fortunate that aunt was at the other window. I had to have air very often and he too!—at the stations more especially! Occasionally aunt called across the nurses and babies: 'Did you speak, Lili?' In answer to which remark I assumed a very astonished expression.—Now, Elsie, he knows all, and charged me to be very kind to you. He said that to me when I left the train; he went farther. And when I have told you that he sent a wreath to your father's grave and that he is going home on leave-of-absence, I have told you all!"

Elsie had ceased weeping. She opened the win-

dow, leaned out and looked into the garden flooded with moonlight; a nightingale was singing sweetly in a linden tree, and her heart throbbed violently.

He thought of her! He had spoken of her on the most wretched day of her life. Oh, joy!

She drew back, closed the window, and bursting into tears, buried her face in her hands. What did it avail her? She was only a poor girl!

XVIII.

Sister Beate sat opposite Frau von Ratenow in the simple room. Their faces were both flushed, for they could not agree. Frau von Ratenow had counted upon aid, and although she had found no enemy, she had found a power which seemed determined to remain neutral; while Sister Beate conceded that the old lady was right in many things, she pleaded Elsie's cause; if the words had issued from Moritz's lips they could not have been more to the same effect—with this difference, that they were more conciliating.

"That will do, my dear," Frau von Ratenow at length interrupted; "we do not understand each other; that I can see. You may be right from your standpoint, but you cannot pass judgment from ours. You live so simply and secluded here; we live in the world, and that requires sacrifices even from Elsie!"

"But not at the cost of one's happiness!" was the reply.

Frau von Ratenow rose. "I should like to retire," said she. "I hope that at least you will

not interfere with my intentions. Elsie must go home with me to-morrow."

"Certainly I shall not, madame. Elsie shall decide for herself."

"I think I shall conquer the stubborn girl," added the old lady. "But tell me, my dear, have you a doctor and a druggist in the place?"

"Certainly; do you feel ill, madame?"

"Oh, it will pass over. I only asked in case of need; occasionally I am taken suddenly ill, and there was a terrible draught in the coupe. Well, we will hope for the best."

"I will fetch you some liniment—"

"Not until I need it, dear; I do not put any faith in such means—at home no doctor dare approach me. I do not care to see Elsie to-night; I have had enough excitement for one day. Tell her to come to my room to-morrow; the other little girl is, of course, with her? Good night."

They had reached the old lady's bedroom, and without another word the latter closed the door in the sister's face. Sister Beate heard her draw a deep breath once as if she were in pain.

She shook her head and went to the next door. Lili had seated herself at the table between the windows and was eating bread and butter and soft-boiled eggs, and drinking a glass of milk with the enviable appetite of youth. With tear-stained face

Elsie sat beside her without partaking of any food. Lili sprang hastily from her seat when Sister Beate entered and dropped a curtsy to the simple woman, as if she were in the presence of a reigning princess.

"I have come to bid the ladies good night," said Sister Beate. "To-morrow morning your aunt wishes to talk with you, Elizabeth; she hopes you will accompany her home. I charge you once more to consider your determination prayerfully. Good night, my dear children; God bless you!"

Lili stared at her in astonishment; then she turned to Elsie, who looked more gloomy than ever. Falling upon her knees before the girl, she said: "Ah, Elsie, Elsie, you are all such pious people here; and yet you have not a particle of confidence in God! And I know that all will yet be well with you—I know it."

"You know it?" asked Elsie.

"Yes."

"How?"

"That I cannot tell; it is in the air, in the spring air, in the blossoms, the birds sing of it and the waters murmur of it. Now, dear heart, forget your sorrow; all will change."

Elsie shook her head and gazed upon the fresh, girlish face, into the dark eyes in which tears shimmered.

"You are surprised at me, Elsie? I have always seemed so superficial to you, have I not? Well, I will tell you frankly, I never took an interest in you. You were so infinitely tiresome with your grief for your lost lover; you were so horribly passive. But when I saw you so pale and sorrowful in spite of your great stroke of good-fortune, at which everyone was rejoicing, I felt sorry for you, and when you ran away yesterday, you won my entire heart at one stroke—everyone would not do that, Elsie; hundreds of girls would have tacitly complied, and would have become Frau von Hegebach. Now, you may depend upon me, Elsie; I will help you, and Moritz will help you, and even Frieda is not as vexed with you as she was."

"Was she vexed with me?" asked Elsie in astonishment.

"Why, child, how could you be so blind? Vexed? She was furiously jealous of you as soon as Moritz mentioned your name. The poor fellow had a hard time of it."

Elsie's pale face was scarlet. Suddenly Frieda's conduct, which at the time had seemed so strange, was clear to her, and it also explained Moritz's timid avoidance of her. She sighed sadly.

"And that too!"

"Make yourself easy, sweet child; there was a touching reconciliation between the couple yester-

day. Frieda cried like a school-girl, and Moritz asked: 'Do you not see, Frieda, that you were absurd?' And she cried *pater peccavi* more softly than I should have given her credit for—and—Elsie, you will come home with us to-morrow; you will not remain here? It must be horribly monotonous. See, I think this way: Hegebach has probably suspected something, and if he asks any questions, Moritz will tell him the whole truth, and then the relations cannot be maintained. Do come, Elsie, *dear* Elsie!"

"No," said the girl rising, "never! I cannot."

Lili was about to reply when a heavy object was thrown against the door.

"Old people want to sleep!" cried Frau von Ratenow's angry voice. "Cease your chatter; I am tired to death!"

Elsie went to bed silently, while Lili tittered from time to time. Her aunt's sternness was a constant source of amusement to her. In the night she started up; the moon shone brightly into the room and, from the bed beside her, she could hear suppressed sobbing.

"Elsie, are you crying?" she asked.

To which question she received no reply.

When Frau von Ratenow awoke the following morning, a letter was awaiting her; the little principal delivered it herself.

Merciful Father, it was Hegebach's handwriting! How did he know she was there? Ah, and her limbs were so heavy; with difficulty she raised herself a little.

"If you please, Sister Beate, my spectacles. I cannot move."

Sister Beate handed them to her and left her alone. The only sound to be heard in the room was the rattling of the paper which the old lady held in her hand.

She had only read a few words when her face turned pale. Suddenly she put her hand to her eyes, her head was dizzy. All had been in vain. All was over!

"Lili!" she cried and her voice sounded like a groan.

The young girl came hastily in response to her call.

"Give that to Elsie and get ready." She held the letter toward her.

"Are you going away, aunt? Shall I tell Elsie?"

"Elsie?" She started up from her pillow. "She who sows in a whirlwind, will reap in a storm. Ingratitude and obstinacy I abhor, to the very depths of my soul."

"Aunt!" exclaimed Lili, frightened at the expression on the old lady's face.

"Go!" cried she, "we will leave in an hour!"

Tremblingly Lili flew to Elsie who was plaiting her fair hair.

"Read this," said she. "Oh, aunt is so angry."

Elsie took the paper and read:

"DEAR MADAME: In haste; this letter must leave by the next mail. I beg of you to give my cousin back her freedom. The rest verbally—later.

"Yours respectfully,

"HERMANN VON HEGEBACH."

For an instant the girl breathed more freely as if relieved. Then she buried her face in her hands, and her whole frame shook from the force of her agonized sobs.

"Elsie! Elsie!" cried Lili, embracing her; but she freed herself from the encircling arms and seized the latch to Frau von Ratenow's door; it was locked.

"Is it you, Lili?" asked the old lady.

"No, it is Elsie, aunt!" she cried in a beseeching voice. All was silent within.

"Aunt!" sobbed the girl. Still all was silent. Nothing was to be heard but footsteps and hasty preparations for departure.

"Aunt, a word!" she knocked at, and tried the door but in vain.

She turned; for a moment she stood there motionlessly, her eyes fixed upon the window, then she

looked at Lili; the tears gushed from her eyes, the whole weight of her loneliness came upon her. She had nothing more upon earth.

An hour later Frau von Ratenow paced up and down the platform at the station, awaiting the train and leaning on Lili's arm. The old lady was in pain; one could see that by her compressed lips; she did not feel well; had she been so constituted she would have wept. She had only done so once, however; that was not when she buried her husband, it was when she took a tiny, wailing infant from its dead mother's arms.

Oh, there was no gratitude in the world! And she began to find fault with the train for being so late, with the porter who stared so at her, with the poor coffee at the Institute and with her aching head, while Lili walked silently beside her with a sorrowful face and eyes inflamed from weeping.

Finally the train arrived.

A week later a gentleman passed through the little village on an express train. It did not stop, but the young man stood at the window of the coupe and looked out as attentively as if it were the loveliest spot in the Thuringen Wald. Then he reseated himself, pushed a violin-case aside, drew out his pocket-book, took from it a letter and read:

"My Dear Bernardi:—You have forced me to this, although I do not like letter-writing, much

less letters with sentimental contents; still I will try, if it will be any consolation to you. There is little that is comforting for you, however. I must even confess that my soldier's heart is in some measure touched as I recall a certain evening on which I felt called upon to give you advice.

"It is true that little Elsie von Hegebach left her cozy nest at the castle, a kind aunt and a fatherly betrothed in order to weep over—I know not what—perhaps *you* do—in the seclusion of a sisterhood.

"All sensible people, and you know how many these are in our community, shrug their shoulders and smile. The bold little maiden has drawn down upon her Frau von Ratenow's wrath. The latter returned home from her chase after the fugitive, dangerously ill; they carried her from the carriage to her bed. She is no better to-day.

"That our set, especially that portion ruled over by the ladies, has plenty of material to work upon, I need not assure you; that the name of 'Bernardi' is often mentioned in connection with the stories, you will perhaps suspect. Unfortunately they are correct. It is a pity for the girl; but upon whom does the blame rest? It is neither your fault nor hers. Everything depends upon money! Why are you not a baron with half a dozen estates? Why does man require so much for his miserable existence? Yes, why? I will cease questioning; I am

really growing sentimental. The little girl with the searching brown eyes haunts me; you should have seen her on the day of the funeral. Do not think that I regret having spoken plainly to you; it was my duty. She will, I hope, forget, though it may be more difficult for her than it would be for some others. Do not grow despondent; you cannot help it—one is a slave to circumstances.

"Farewell, Bernardi.

"Yours, VON ROST."

How often he had read that letter! He replaced it in his pocket-book, and gazed into space, as if he could there find an answer to the question "Why?" asked in the letter. A number of plans took shape in the young lieutenant's brain: in his anguish, he gnashed his teeth—a slave to circumstances!

The train rushed past a railroad warder's house on the edge of the forest; in the May sunshine, beneath the birches, on the threshold, sat a young woman holding a child upon her knee; her husband stood near by—and Bernardi experienced a pang of bitter jealousy.

The children of the "people" love one another, marry and are happy; if they have nothing to eat they starve together as they work together.

Elsie would have worked and starved with him —that he had read in her eyes.

"Elsie will find no consolation!" said an inner voice. "She will mourn away her youth and the sunny, charming creature, will become a sour old maid."

Then he thought as he did daily: What should he do? Should he choose another calling?

Suddenly Frau von Ratenow stood before him as upon that evening saying: "Do you think that people in other walks of life exist upon air? Do you think you would be contented if you discarded your gay uniform?"

He would have liked to sell out and become either a merchant, an agriculturist or an artist. But what would his aged father and mother say, who had deprived themselves of every penny in order to gratify his desire to become a soldier?

Farewell, ye dreams! Farewell, Elsie! What can a "slave to circumstances" do?

"He has come back more depressed than when he went away," said one of his comrades.

"Silly fellow! He really broods over his unhappy love-affair to this day," added another with a smile.

XIX.

Autumn had come again. A grate-fire burned brightly in old Frau von Ratenow's room, while she sat as erect as ever at the window with her knitting. Her face was no longer so full, she was changed; her severe illness of the spring had left its traces upon her. She had convalesced very slowly. The summer she spent at Baden-Baden. Frieda and Lili, who accompanied her—Moritz remained at home—were at liberty to change their costumes three times daily, to go to the springs, and to take excursions in the afternoons with hastily-formed acquaintances.

She was satisfied to sit alone in the garden and to hear nothing of that silly chatter and confusion. At home things were better.

Aunt Lott was again there and she dared to express her mind if the subject of Elsie was broached. Aunt Lott was indefatigable in her attempts to introduce the topic.

"You must own that I am right, Lott; the child certainly trampled her good fortune sinfully under foot.

"Yes, Ratenow, but—"

"But? I thought there was no 'but' in this case, —now let her make the best of what she has brought upon herself! Compromising herself and us in that way!"

"Ratenow, how can you talk so?" Aunt Lott would say tearfully. "How can you refuse to read her letters? Why, when I merely look at them the tears come into my eyes."

She would receive no reply, and the conversation ceased, only to be resumed and dropped in the same way a few days later.

Aunt Lott corresponded regularly with her pet. She kept her informed of every trifling occurrence at the castle, and conscientiously delivered every message with which Elsie charged her. Only one desire she could not bring about: and that was to obtain a kind word for her from Aunt Ratenow; nor could she find out to a certainty that Hegebach was not vexed with Elsie. He was so unapproachable.

He came as usual to see Frau von Ratenow, and they played chess together. He calmly smoked his cigar in her drawing-room, and once surprised the old lady with the information that he was just like a grandfather at home, with his dressing-gown and long pipe.

"Why, my dear Hegebach!" Frau von Ratenow

looked at him incredulously; he was still so young and handsome in her eyes; at the same time it struck her that his hair was remarkably gray on his temples. He did not inquire for Elsie. But when at the girl's request Aunt Lott occasionally visited her parents' grave, she always found them decorated with the finest flowers, and the sexton's wife informed her that it was done at Herr von Hegebach's orders. Aunt Lott was pleased, and thanked him once when an opportunity presented itself.

"Why should you thank me?" he asked. "They are my relatives."

Otherwise things were unchanged at the castle.

Frieda had a governess for the children, danced and went to balls with as much enjoyment as ever.

Moritz played whist and held consultations with his mother—the only difference was that the bone of contention had disappeared.

Elsie's light footsteps no longer were heard upon the stairs; she no longer sang her pretty ballads in the drawing-room and played at hide-and-seek with the children. Still something bright, something lovable was lacking—all felt it, but no one expressed that want. Only occasionally at twilight Aunt Lott thought the door *must* open, that Elsie must enter and cry in her clear, young voice: "Aunt Lott, dear Aunt Lott!"

At times Frau von Ratenow started, for she too

heard that voice, earnestly imploring: "Aunt, only one word!" Then over her crept an indefinable feeling, half of anger, half of melancholy.

"No, if anything was to be done with the girl, it must be accomplished by severity."

Hegebach was surely of her opinion: she might perhaps become more submissive in that secluded spot.

On this particular day of which we are writing, the house was very quiet. Frieda and Lili had been to the old lady's room to show themselves in their heavy silk dresses trimmed with flowers and laces, in the full glory of their festal array. Both were dressed alike, in light blue and silver, and carried bouquets of Gloire de Dijon roses.

It was Annie Cramm's wedding-day. The ceremony was to take place at three o'clock, the dinner at four, and the whole village was in a state of excitement.

Reports had been circulated as to the wonderful display to be made, and Aunt Lott went to the church at two o'clock in order to obtain a good seat.

Old Frau von Ratenow was all alone; her thoughts were occupied with the couple who were about to be married; what an apology for a wife Annie Cramm would make, though she were covered with lace and brocade. With her the old lady

compared Elsie; she saw the girl by Bernardi's side, she heard her joyous laughter, and involuntarily she fancied them in the place of the other couple at that time probably taking their seats at the bountifully spread board.

What nonsense! She cleared her throat and began to knit. But the picture was so fascinating, it returned.

"Yes, yes, Elsie was far superior to Annie Cramm but she had no money!"

Twilight crept on apace, a carriage entered the court.

"Can it be Hegebach? I thought he was at the dinner!"

It was Hegebach, however. He entered and kissed her hand.

"What!" she asked. "Is it all over?"

"Not yet, madame," said he, drawing his chair quite near hers. "I only longed to talk with you, to pour out my heart to you."

She listened to him in silence, as he continued: "The dinner was truly excellent and the wine fine; old Mr. Cramm has good taste, that cannot be denied. The bridegroom is a remarkable fellow; at dessert he suddenly left his better-half and seated himself beside me."

"Surely that was strange," assented the old lady.

"Yes, was it not? However, he has sensible ideas and seems to be practical."

"He proved that to-day," said Frau von Ratenow dryly.

"How? Ah, yes, everyone to his taste. He spoke to me of Elsie." At last her name had passed his lips. "Yesterday she sent a small present. But I did not intend to speak of it to you; pardon me, madame."

Frau von Ratenow looked at him nonplused. Had Hegebach taken to much wine? "I do not know whether you can put yourself in my place," he continued. "I almost believe you cannot. I feel so unspeakably lonesome. I do not know for whom I am working and living; it seems to me as if my entire house looked at me sadly, as if every fire-place yawned in order to ask me: 'Why are we here?' This cannot continue, madame, for it makes me mentally and physically ill." He paused a moment. "I have Bennewitz on my hands however, and it has occurred to me to once more—" He did not continue.

"To marry," suggested the old lady.

"No," said he abruptly, leaning back in his chair. Frau von Ratenow turned and looked at him; it was dark, she could only see that he was gazing past her out of the window.

"No, surely not, madame," he added. "I think of

doing something else which will not bring us personally into such close relations, and which will not call forth a refusal—for that wounds. You know, no one is free from vanity!"

The old lady sat there in breathless expectation.

"I shall try once more to bind a young life to mine, but in a different way. I want to adopt a child."

"Hegebach, you wish, you can—" cried she joyfully. She hesitated. "But girls can inherit nothing," said she doubtfully.

"Girls! who mentioned a girl?" he asked.

He received no reply.

Yes, the man was right; why had Elsie conducted herself thus? Oh, the miserable child! It was hard, hard!

"What do you think of my plan, madame?"

"It is excellent," she replied with difficulty, while sympathy for the poor girl who would have to go through life alone conquered her vexation.

"Now, I must seek some one," said Hegebach.

"You will find plenty of applicants."

"Of course." He laughed. "The little bit of money will tempt them. It would be refreshing to find someone who would say 'no'. By the bye, how is my cousin?"

"I—I do not know; probably she is well," replied Frau von Ratenow.

Hegebach's manner puzzled her.

"Are you still angry with her, madame? That is wrong of you, indeed. Do you know that in my thoughts I have begged the child's pardon a thousand times for the sorrow we occasioned her; yes, madame, I say 'we', you, my cousin, and myself. Our only excuse is that we meant well. I must leave you now." He rose. "Did you not say I was right? One must have somebody to love?"

"Yes, yes, dear Hegebach. And may you never regret it."

When the door closed behind him, the old lady remained standing in the middle of the room.

"Either he is intoxicated or he is getting crotchety in his old age, like all the Hegebachs."

That same evening she wrote a letter to Elsie. Poor child. To lose all in that way! But it was her own fault.

It was a strange letter, half-reproachful, half-tender, containing the request that she should return.

The old lady did not close her eyes that night; the next day she was very absent-minded; she spoke scarcely a word at the table, although Hegebach's latest project was being discussed.

"The man is quite right," said Moritz. "Of course, he wishes to leave his property to someone nearly related to him, otherwise it would go to the Crown.

But he might have first given Elsie some pin-money out of his private purse," he added.

"Yes," agreed Aunt Lott. "It is a mean revenge to leave her upon her own resources thus; he is her cousin, too."

"As if Elsie would accept it!" Lili pursed up her lips contemptuously.

"Oho!" said Frau von Ratenow who up to that time had maintained silence. "She probably knows now what it is to take care of oneself; she would gladly accept it; but he would be a fool to give it to her, *I* think."

"You do not think so, mother," said Moritz, taking her hand.

Frau von Ratenow had ordered her carriage directly after dinner. To her son's astonishment it drew up at the door.

"Where are you going, mother?" he asked, when the old lady wrapped in furs—for the day was chilly—passed out of the house, followed by a maid with robes and a foot-muff.

"For a drive," she replied concisely.

Moritz made no further remark; he understood her; she had something especial on hand. He helped her respectfully into the carriage, but was forced to suppress a smile; the weather was too unpleasant to have tempted his mother to take a drive.

The carriage rolled through the court. Frau von

Ratenow carefully wrapped the robes about her. At the city gate she threw them aside and looked out of the window.

"Take the road to Bustrow, Jochen, but drive quickly." At Bustrow, Frau von Ratenow bade Jochen stop.

"Is this the road to Bennewitz?" she asked.

"Yes, madame."

"Drive on, Jochen."

Jochen drove rapidly, for rain was beginning to fall and one could see by the clouds that it was to be no mere shower. In ten minutes Jochen drew up at the stately old gabled house. A servant helped the old lady to alight.

"It is I, Seeben," she said to the astonished man. "Is the baron at home?"

"Yes, will madame enter?"

"You can put up the horses awhile, Jochen," said she to the coachman, entering the house which she was surprised to find so cozy and pleasant. What a change Hegebach had wrought in that old, neglected place! "Silly Elsie!" murmured she, as she stood in the spacious drawing-room.

"I will tell master you are here," said the servant, placing a light-brown arm-chair at the fireplace; "he is engaged at present."

Frau von Ratenow seated herself and glanced at the large picture over the mantel-piece.

"His first wife," said she to herself. "Hegebach had always good taste," she thought as she gazed at the painting which looked down upon her from its frame. Upon the mantel-piece beneath the picture, stood a vase filled with fragrant roses. "He loved her dearly," thought the old lady. "Would it not be unpleasant for the second wife if her husband divided his attentions between her and the dead? But he will not marry!"

She was aroused from her reverie by the sound of voices in the adjoining room; soon after, the door opened, and a woman of about forty entered the drawing-room, followed by a slender boy of fifteen. They passed Frau von Ratenow with a bow; the latter looked after them with mingled feelings of astonishment and perplexity. She suddenly shook her head and murmured: "Is that so?" as if she had made an important but unpleasant discovery. At that moment Hegebach appeared and raised her hand to his lips.

"My dear Frau von Ratenow, to what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"Does it not seem strange for me to come upon you so suddenly?"

"It is delightful, madame."

He begged her to resume her seat, and he seated himself opposite her.

"I shall not remain long, Hegebach. I almost

believe I interrupted you at—at an important moment."

"Not at all; there is plenty of time," he replied.

"He is a handsome boy, Hegebach."

"The one who just passed through here?" he asked. "Yes, he is a fine fellow."

A pause ensued; finally Hegebach said: "I am glad that you came, madame, or possibly I should have come to you. I am uneasy and excited; you know wherefore. It is a step which is not trifling. To take a stranger and to expect from him all that one expects from one's own flesh and blood – love, solicitude, respect—is not an easy matter, is it, madame? and it is, too, somewhat peculiar."

The old lady nodded. She was still thinking of the handsome youth. She could bear the suspense no longer.

"Pardon me, Hegebach," she said, drawing a deep breath; "was that boy a candidate for the position?"

"Who?"

"The boy who with his mother—"

"Ah, madame, no, no. I am his guardian and take a keen interest in him; he was my poor Heinrich's best friend, but—"

"Pardon me, Hegebach."

"But," he continued, not noticing the interruption, "I have already been making negotiations, and am expecting a reply at any moment."

The old lady was again upon tenter-hooks.

"My dear Hegebach, I wish you success." She rose hastily; it was dark. "I must hasten home; they do not know where I am. There is no need for me to remain. I came hither to make you a proposition—I—had a plan—now it is too late. No offense, Hegebach."

Hegebach did not reply; there was no sound in the room except the rustling of the heavy silk, as Frau von Ratenow fastened her mantle, and the ticking of the clock.

"Good-bye, Hegebach. You know old ladies like to interfere in other folks' affairs, but I meant well."

In silence he followed her to the door.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" he asked at length. "Will you not take some refreshment?"

She refused; she had her hand on the door-knob when the old servant entered with a lamp and handed Hegebach a dispatch.

"Wait a moment, madame," said he, breaking the seal and drawing nearer the light. "Read it," said he; "I have been unfortunate again," and he handed her the sheet of paper.

She put on her spectacles and read:

"Could not be persuaded. VON ROST."

"What does that mean?" she asked hastily.

"A refusal from my chosen son!"

He was very pale. Aunt Ratenow looked at the dispatch; she read the name of the place from which it was sent; she read the signature, and her old heart rejoiced.

"Did you care particularly for this one?"

"Yes," said he.

"Give me power to act, Hegebach; you scarcely know him. Let me—"

"I scarcely know him at all," said he; "one thing alone impelled me to select him."

"Hegebach!" The old lady approached the man who was still standing by the table. "Hegebach!" She tried to speak but burst into tears. She wept for joy and at the same time she was vexed with herself for weeping: nothing provoked her more than to be surprised in a moment of weakness, and quickly drying her tears she began to scold: "I should not help you, Hegebach, indeed! But that is the way it always is when two men try to do something clever! Rost? He has probably told a fine story; could you not find a better embassador? And why was I to know nothing about it? Confess if you please, Hegebach!"

He smiled.

"We wanted to surprise you, madame, for you had not thought of him."

"Is that so?" she asked smiling amid her tears. "Notwithstanding that, old Frau von Ratenow must do the best she can in the matter."

Yes, indeed, she had to. Late that evening Moritz received the information that his mother was going away the following morning, with a shake of his head. She went, and returned in three days. Then Hegebach arrived and they left together. That time Moritz at least knew where they were going: to Berlin.

"Mamma wants to get Hegebach a son because he did not succeed in getting a wife," said Frieda. "If I could only understand *one* thing, Moritz!"

"What is it?"

"I always thought mamma was in favor of his marriage on Elsie's account; but what advantage it will be to her to help him in the adoption of a son, is a mystery to me! It does not concern her, does it, Moritz?"

Moritz was so ungallant as not to reply. He only whistled softly.

That evening the von Rosts called. It was raining, and Frieda's blue boudoir looked very cozy.

The young couple had returned quickly from their wedding tour. Annie had been everywhere, and the weather was unpleasant; moreover, Rost had chosen such a strange route. Instead of taking his young wife to Vienna, he took her to the obscure town of H—, and there he disappeared for half a day. "To buy a horse," he told Annie afterward. And then—Annie told it half-laughing,

half-irritably, he had crowned all by taking her to Berlin. "To Berlin, with which I am as familiar as I am with my native town! Then my patience was exhausted! We saw your mother-in-law there," she added inquiringly.

"Mamma has a secret mission there," said Frieda with a shake of her head.

"Hegebach was in Berlin, too," said Annie.

"Bernardi wished to be remembered to all," said von Rost, putting on his gloves and turning to Frieda.

"Was he in Berlin?" cried the latter in astonishment.

Moritz laughed softly to himself. Then he begged to be excused; he was to meet his mother at the station.

"So, my boy," said Frau von Ratenow, when an hour later she sat beside her son in the carriage which rolled rapidly toward the castle, "matters are getting straightened out! But it cost a great deal of trouble. What do you think, Moritz? Hegebach had to go even to the Emperor. In a few weeks Hegebach will have a son, and *such* an one!"

XX.

It was winter. The tiny village in which Elsie had found a retreat nestled among the bare trees; one could plainly see the distant hills through their leafless branches.

In the rooms at the sisterhood the logs crackled in the stoves and the lamps were lighted.

Elsie von Hegebach had just left the school-room. About her were thirty little girls who rushed into the garden and at once began a fierce fight with snowballs."

The young girl stood at the door and watched the children. A smile flitted across her pale face, for she had done the same, not so many years since.

She inhaled a deep breath of the invigorating air; it was so refreshing after the close atmosphere of the school-room. Then she crossed the garden to a building in the rear, mounted a flight of stairs and entered her own room; the pleasantest hour of the day had come.

There she read or wrote letters, or she sat at the window, gazed into the dim distance and dreamed.

Of what did she dream when she was alone and a violin gave forth an old familiar melody?

Miss Brown, the English governess, always played for an hour at dusk.

Occasionally Elsie could not listen to the music; those were the days on which heartache and yearning came upon her with all their force, on which she thought she could not bear such an existence forever. Her head and heart throbbed, her eyes ached from weeping, and she asked herself: why she had no happiness, none at all? She then fled from the tones of the violin, rushing out into the stormy night, or else she sought Sister Beate and sat with her for hours in silence.

"I can not listen to the violin, Sister Beate."

"I will give you another room, Elizabeth."

"No, no!" she cried eagerly.

On this especial day she approached the chest, the upper drawer of which she opened; from it she took several papers and seated herself with them at the window. She read over and over the letters which she had received two months before and which furnished her with so much food for thought.

"DEAR ELSIE:—You know that it was not on my own account that I was angry with you, but because you stood in the way of your own happiness. Well, that cannot be helped; you must bear what you have brought upon yourself and God in

His mercy will guide you; for I am pious enough to think that our whole path in life is mapped out by God's hand when we are still in swaddling-clothes. That is the Turkish belief!

"I think that God gives us intelligence that we may act for ourselves. You did not use your intelligence rightly, but allowed yourself to be governed by your simple heart; the consequences were worse than I thought they would be. But enough! You will find that out in time, and will regret it. Now, Elsie, I beg of you to come back!—back to the house of your youth. Free yourself from your obligations there; you can be useful here too. I hope you will come soon; the winter evenings are long and I should like to have you read aloud to me as you did last year. Farewell!

"Your ever affectionate,

"Aunt Ratenow."

She shook her head. "No!" said she half-aloud, laying the letter aside. "I am no trained dog that leaps over the stick which is held before him! No!"

Then she took up another letter, in Lili's handwriting. She passed hastily over the description of Annie Cramm's wedding, to the close of the letter which read as follows: "There was a telegram, too, from Bernardi. Now you will be surprised, Elsie! The newly-fledged husband seems to have formed a friendship with Hegebach; he suddenly

left his dear bride and seated himself beside him, directly opposite me. They talked very earnestly and in very low tones; finally they clinked glasses and separated. Hegebach disappeared after the banquet, and as I discovered later, sought Aunt Ratenow.

"And now, you see, Elsie, I am coming to what I wanted to tell you. I have no more hope, for Hegebach is going to 'retire,' that means he is going to invest in a grandfather's chair; he will never marry! He is going to adopt a son. Your aunt says he is right, but I can see that she is secretly furious, for, dearest, she was determined that you should live at Bennewitz. She left you at D— and would not forgive you—as a last resort she wanted to tame you by hunger!

"That is the state of things! Ah, dear Elsie, I am afraid we shall both die old maids, and I am not cut out for one like Aunt Lott; she is a born old maid."

Yes, that was it! Aunt Ratenow wanted to tame her; now Hegebach had put an end to all such hopes. No, no! Aunt had always been kind, but she could never return to her. All the sleepless nights, the miserable hours spent in her house occurred to her.

She unfolded a third sheet of paper in her own handwriting; it was a sketch of her reply to Aunt Ratenow.

"My Dear Aunt:—Many thanks for your kind words which pleased and comforted me. It caused me great sorrow to have awakened your displeasure, and only the consciousness that I was doing right sustained me during the sad days which followed your departure.

"Accept my hearty thanks for the love you always lavished upon me and which to-day you again bestow on me. How could I ever forget what you have done for me?

"But, pray do not consider me obstinate and ungrateful—I shall remain here: I feel that work is the only thing which can console me for the painful experiences I have had during the past year."

She let the paper fall. Had she not written too bitterly? The words had flowed involuntarily from her pen. She gathered the letters together again and remained in her seat.

Miss Brown was playing the violin in the next room; she seemed very melancholy that day; she had begun with "Home, sweet home."

The English governess was a tall, red-haired, freckled creature, with eyes in which constantly lay an expression of homesickness. Her happiest hours were when she played the violin in the twilight, and Elsie, closing her eyes and listening to the strains, dreamed of another hand which wielded the bow in such a masterly style, of tones which

were infinitely more sweet and tender, and the tears started to her eyes.

Someone stumbled up the stairs; who could it be? Probably the lamp was not burning in the hall; someone passed her door, the footsteps were those of a man. Someone knocked at the door next to hers; the violinist ceased playing.

"Come in," she heard Miss Brown say, immediately afterward followed by an embarrassed "dear me" while a man's deep voice apologetically asked for some information. It was a familiar voice.

In a trice Elsie stood at the open door; her eyes pierced the darkness, her hand pressed to her throbbing heart.

"Moritz?" she asked, softly and doubtfully.

"Elsie, my dear child, where are you? In this Egyptian darkness one cannot see one's hand before one's eyes! Ah, my girl, you did not expect me, eh?"

That was Moritz's voice. They entered Elsie's small room; she could not yet realize that it was he.

"Is it you, Moritz?" With trembling fingers she lighted the lamp and then looked into his face.

"Yes, it is I!" He took off his cloak and extended both hands. "What does he want, you will wonder! He has come to fetch you, you run-away! I dare not reappear at the castle without you."

She shook her head and raised her tearful eyes to his. He smiled and seated himself comfortably in a chair near the stove.

"Only on a visit of a few days, Elsie. Mother must see you. She could not travel or she would have come herself; she is not strong yet; she was very ill in the spring. So they sent me."

"Aunt wrote to me some time ago," said Elsie.

"And you replied, I know."

Elsie blushed. "I could not do otherwise, Moritz."

"Mother asks nothing of you, Elsie, but to come; you will be at liberty to leave at any moment."

"I do not know, Moritz, if I can—"

"You can, Elsie. Dress yourself warmly and come."

"What, Moritz, without saying anything?"

"I spent an hour conferring with Sister Beate—all is settled."

"I do not like to go," said she.

"Of course not," he replied, "or you would not be a Hegebach. Obstinacy is in the blood!"

"Moritz!" The tears came again. "I have never occasioned anyone anything but sorrow and vexation since I have been born—unintentionally, but so it is—my father, your mother and you. Yes, Moritz, you too, and you were always so kind! Let me remain here, ah, let me remain!"

He laughed.

"You dear, silly, little girl," said he encircling her waist with his arm, "so you know about that too? Well, to comfort you, let me say that Frieda was the first to propose that I should and must fetch you. Aunt Lott indeed offered to come, but Frieda insisted that I should come. Now, are you satisfied? Cry if you want to; you have fifteen minutes yet, and in the meantime I will go to the tavern and sample your celebrated liquor. I will return in fifteen minutes, Elsie, and pray have a light, for those stairs are dangerous in the dark. Good-bye; be ready."

She remained seated defiantly; she did not want to go; who could force her? What right had they to drag her away from the peace she had so dearly bought? She was still sitting there when Moritz returned. He looked at her in surprise with his honest, blue eyes, then he took his watch in his hand and stood by the stove.

"There are ten minutes left," said his lips, but his eyes said: "I did not expect that!"

She rose, took her cloak out of the closet and a few things out of the chest of drawers and put them in a sachel. She again stood still, glanced around the room, and again "I cannot" trembled upon her lips. Suddenly she was in the hall, ready for a journey, shaking hands with Sister Beate.

"God bless you, Elizabeth," said the latter.

"I shall come back soon, Sister Beate!"

"If God wills!" said the gentle little woman.

It was snowing.

"Did you wrap up warmly, child?" asked Moritz tenderly.

She nodded and walked beside him in silence.

There was very little time to spare. Elsie scarcely knew how she entered the coupe so quickly.

"It is a good train," said Moritz, as they started, "it only takes five hours; at eleven o'clock we shall be at home."

At home!

The girl turned away and looked through the window. She felt weakly submissive, and in consequence miserable. Moritz perceived it and tried to help her overcome it.

"I know nothing new," he began. "The Rosts are very gay and have a great deal of company. Frau Annie surpasses everyone in elegance of entertainments and toilettes; Lili is on the point of becoming engaged—so she writes my wife. It is an old love-affair, I believe; my father-in-law up to this time, opposed her wishes. Her lover has passed his medical examination at Heidelberg, and she, who always seemed so frivolous, has managed the rest."

Elsie raised her eyes, but said nothing; she was still more wretched.

"And Hegebach has carried out his plan. Will you permit me to smoke a little, Elsie? Thank you very much. He has an adopted son. Is it too warm here for you, Elsie?"

"Yes, please open the window."

"Mother had to lend a hand," he continued; "he would otherwise not have been successful; now he seems quite contented."

"I am glad," said she.

They were the first words she had spoken.

"Very soon he intends celebrating the event. You can imagine, Elsie, that he is again the talk of the town."

Yes, indeed! And she too probably; and she had been so silly as to go with Moritz! She wrapped herself more closely in her mantle, drew her veil over her face and leaned her head back upon the cushions. She was vexed with herself.

The train rushed on, and Moritz slept. The nearer they drew to their destination, the more nervous she grew. It seemed to her like a dream when she found herself in the carriage—like a sad and yet a blissful dream. The coachman's "Good evening," sounded so pleasant, and the small coupe smelt so sweetly of the perfume of which Frieda was so fond. Involuntarily her heart expanded.

Finally she stood in the hall, half-dazed, while Moritz excused Frieda for not being on hand; she was probably asleep and so was his mother, but Aunt Lott was waiting upstairs; would she go up?

She ascended the wide, carpeted staircase, and in Aunt Lott's doorway stood a beloved little form with outstretched arms.

"Ah, thank God, Elsie my darling, that you have come!" cried Aunt Lott, folding the girl in her embrace. "How nice that you are here! now everything will be all right."

How she *did* chatter, the dear, old lady; how she urged warm tea upon her, and how silently Elsie sat there, saying at length: "Does it not smell of violets?"

"You only think so, Elsie; it is the perfume of remembrance—yes, yes, I know what that is!"

Then Aunt Lott insisted that Elsie retire; she must be bright in the morning, she looked so pale and— Elsie lay in her bed and glanced around the room; the fire was still burning in the stove; there stood the trunk and there the doll's house. Involuntarily she felt at home. Dreams and reality began to struggle one with another, and she fell asleep.

It was broad daylight when she awoke; the sun was shining brightly into her room. It surely *did* smell of violets! She opened and closed her eyes

several times; she could not trust them; then she started from her pillows.

Frau von Ratenow sat upon the edge of the bed, looking very solemn, a large bunch of violets in her hand.

"Good morning, lazy Elsie!"

"Oh, aunt, forgive me!" stammered Elsie in confusion.

"I am glad that you have come, my girl, and now give me your hand. There is to be no more obstinacy and no ill-feeling. Your old aunt meant no harm; you must have known that. Now she begs your pardon, for she grieved you and caused you pain."

With those words she drew the girl tenderly to her, patted her cheek and laid the bunch of violets upon the bed.

"They are from Hegebach, Elsie," said she.

Elsie turned pale.

"Yes, they are, Elsie! And I have a message for you; but dress yourself quickly, I will go to Aunt Lott in the meantime."

With an anxiously-throbbing heart, the girl dressed herself. It was impossible that they could have prepared another blow for her—no—Moritz had told her he had an adopted son—it was probably to make atonement.

She entered Aunt Lott's cozy room.

"Oh, what a deligthful day!" said the latter pointing toward the window.

"Just nice for a sleigh-ride," said Frau von Ratenow.

"How would you like a sleighing-party, Elsie? But come, Lott, are you ready? We are all going to breakfast with Moritz to-day, Elsie."

She took the young girl's arm and walked down the corridor with her.

"I cannot help it, Elsie, I must tell you," she said as they proceeded on their way downstairs. "Hegebach presents his compliments—of course, I mean Hegebach, Senior—Hegebach, Junior does not yet dare—he once promised your father to provide for you, to guard and protect you, and he will keep his word. As you refused *him*, he hopes that he will meet with your approval in proposing that you become his daughter-in-law. Why, child, do not be so absurd! What ails you? Hold her, Aunt Lott!"

But it was not necessary. Elsie leaned semi-unconsciously upon the shoulder of the old lady who had just opened the door leading into the room.

"Elsie! Elsie! You always were so brave and now you are faint-hearted! Yes, yes, Hegebach's son plays the violin; he is a talented fellow!"

Elsie suddenly stood alone in the handsome apartment; she grasped one of the high chair-backs

and listened—it was impossible! All that which her aunt had said to her, the strains which reached her ear, whispered of infinite bliss—no, it could not be!

Suddenly the music ceased, steps approached and a voice cried: "Elsie, this is indeed happiness."

In the adjoining room all was still. Aunt Ratenow drew near the portieres, raised them for a moment and looked through them. Then she turned to Hegebach; nodding her head gravely she gave him her hand. Tick-tack, said the clock; not a word was to be heard in the other room, only once there was the sound of sobs.

"Well, come forth, children!" cried Moritz at length, growing impatient.

They came in response to his call, and a child radiant with happiness fell upon Hegebach's neck.

"Cousin!" she sobbed, "you have forgiven me—you are so kind—much too kind to me!"

"I had nothing to forgive, my child," said he tenderly.

"How can I prove my gratitude, cousin?"

"By coming to Bennewitz very soon; it is so lonesome there."

"She would not listen to me—confess it, Elsie," said Bernardi, drawing her from Hegebach's arms to his breast. "She said she was only a poor girl!"

THE END.